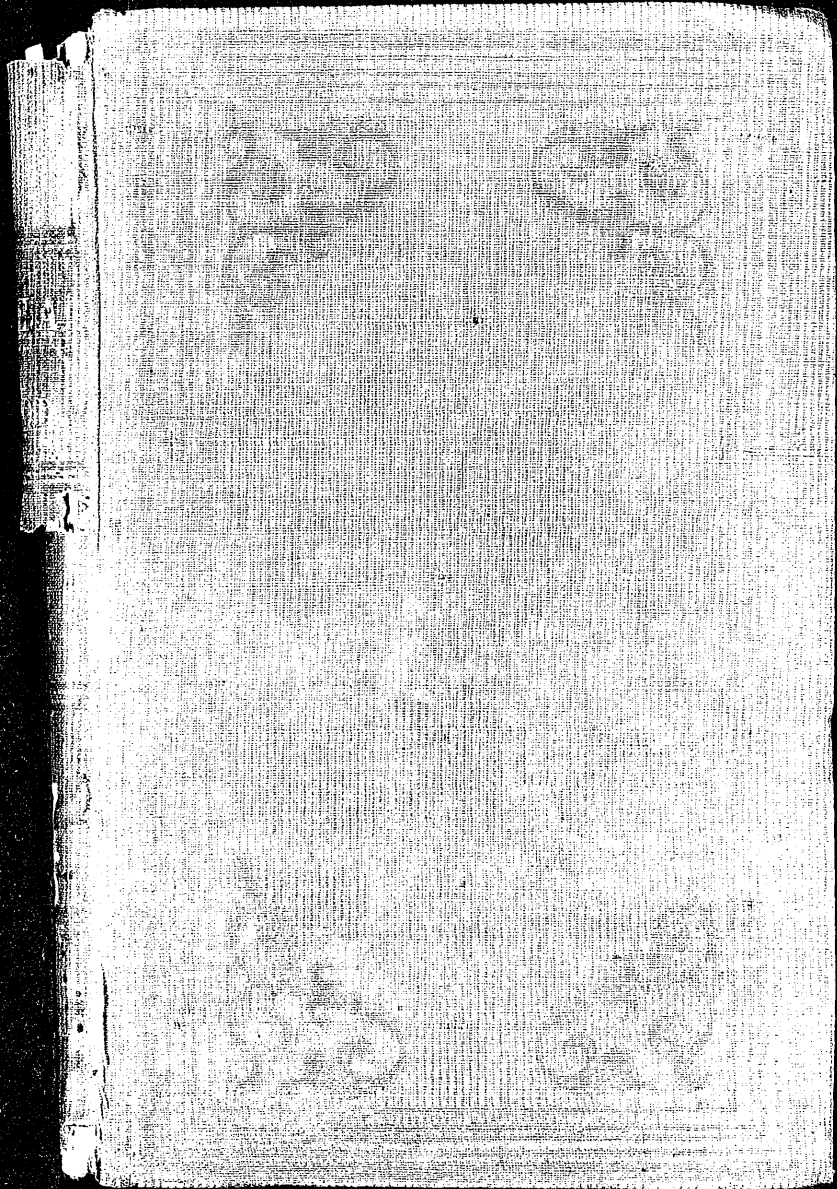
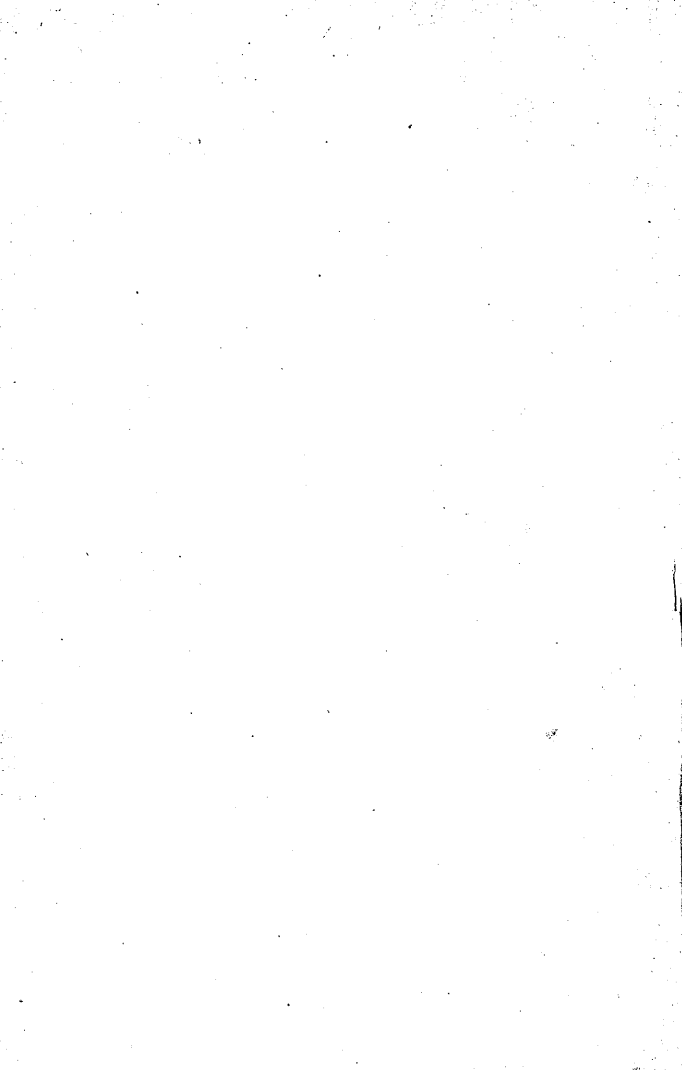




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LUCILLA;

OR,

THE, READING OF THE BIBLE.

L.F.J.
BY, ADOLPHE MONOD.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

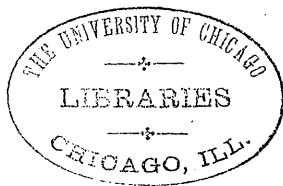
"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."—PSALM i. 1, 2.

LONDON:
THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY;
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PREFACE,

BY THE TRANSLATOR.

THE work of which a translation is here presented to the English reader, has recently been published in France, where the whole of the first impression was sold in a very short period. It is the production of a Protestant minister of deep piety, of pre-eminent talents, and of ardent zeal in the cause of Christianity. His design is to prove, that the Holy Scriptures are inspired of God, and are, consequently, of Divine authority; and that it is at once the privilege and duty of all people to read them with a reference to their personal salvation. The volume is, therefore, on the one hand, an antidote to Infidelity, which regards the Bible as a merely human composition, and to Popery, on the other, which would restrict the reading of the sacred books. The manner in which the author has executed his task is worthy of high praise. His reasoning is beautifully simple, lucid, and strong; and his spirit, kind, benevolent, serious, and firm. He speaks with authority, for he thoroughly understands his subject;

and with tender affection, for his heart yearns over those who obstinately reject the word of God, and who are passing to their final account ignorant of its blessed truths.

The work is especially adapted to France, where a blind infidelity scoffs at the Bible, considered as a revelation from God; where the Romish priesthood inveigh against the general reading of that holy volume; and where the agents of Bible Societies are labouring in the length and breadth of the land, with a most laudable assiduity, to press it upon the attention of all classes of the community, offering it at moderate prices from door to door. It is hoped, that this admirable publication may be of considerable use in England, where infidelity and Romanism are unhappily too prevalent. Should it contribute, in any degree, to arrest the progress of these kindred evils, and encourage the reading of that inspired book, which an old writer has justly called "the great charter of the world's blessedness," the author and translator will consider themselves rewarded. It is committed to the press with earnest prayers for the Divine blessing.

LUCILLA;

OR,

THE READING OF THE BIBLE.

INTRODUCTION.

LETTER I.

LUCILLA TO THE ABBE FAVIEN.

SIR,—You will, perhaps, be surprised to receive a letter from me. You will be still more so, when you have read its contents. But you are the only person in the world to whom I dare open my mind, on a subject by which it has been much engrossed for the last few weeks.

For the first time in my life, I begin to perceive that I have no religion, and I wish that I had one. Like every body else, or at least like every woman, I have had moments of religious excitement; especially about the age of fifteen, when I felt the necessity of giving my heart to God. These were, however, but transient impressions. Soon the pleasures of the world, and the reception I

met with in society ; then the attachment I felt for Mr. Lassalle ; and, lastly, the duties connected with my position in life—my husband—the cares of my household—my children—have absorbed all my attention ; and if the habit I have acquired, of attending mass with my family, has reminded me from time to time that there is a God, I must confess that I have rarely thought of him when not at church. My husband, as you know, takes little interest in my religious convictions. If I have been indifferent, he is, I fear, altogether an infidel.

Probably you are not aware that I am a Protestant by birth. Hardly, indeed, can I remember the fact. My mother died at the time of my birth, and my father before I had completed my twelfth year. At the period of my marriage I had none but very distant relations. Without resistance, without having come to any decision on the subject, I complied with the religious observances of the family, of which I then became a member ; and my children are brought up in the practice of the same rites. But, with shame I confess it, I have never communicated in either the one church or the other ; and I am forty-one years of age.

A circumstance, which you will, perhaps, consider trivial, first directed my attention to these things. On All Saints' Day, the weather being delightful, we went out for a walk, and passed

the walls of a neighbouring cemetery. Our conversation for a moment lost its general frivolity, and for about five minutes we spoke of death and the grave. This question arose in my mind: "If I die, where shall I be interred? A Protestant by birth, a Catholic by position, but, in reality, having no fixed belief, and having communicated with neither, to which of these two churches will my body belong?"

Think of me as you will, sir, but this doubt tormented me, pursued me, and gave rise to the first serious reflections I had ever made concerning religion. I began by being perplexed about my body; and I ended by being anxious about my soul. In short, I wished to know what I was. Or rather, I wished to be a Catholic in reality: I see no reason that should induce me to return to the religion of my fathers. Should the two communions be equal in their claims, I should find it easier to remain what I am, or, at least, what I am believed to be. I can become a Catholic without remark; I cannot declare myself a Protestant without exciting attention. I am also desirous not to separate myself from my husband and children; and I would do any thing in the world rather than cause a division in my family.

But I have graver motives for preferring the Catholic religion. Do not consider this as a compliment; I should say the same thing were I addressing a Protestant minister. Notwithstanding

the prejudice of birth, I must acknowledge that your religion has a certain air of authority, which the other does not possess. Its extensiveness, its order, its antiquity, even the pomp of its ceremonies, and the beauty of its edifices, all conspire to attract me. I feel, nevertheless, the necessity of being better acquainted with a system which I am desirous of embracing; and while waiting for fresh light on the subject, I have applied myself to the study of "The Christian's Manual,"* which I had used at church, almost without thinking of what I read.

One thing especially struck me in this book: I mean, the passages which I there find quoted from the Holy Scriptures. Either I have thought that the Bible is the common basis of the two Christian communions, and that in reading it I was not acting contrary either to the Catholic or Protestant faith; or there is something peculiar and indescribable, which stamps this part of the "Manual," and distinguishes it from every other: but the fact is, these fragments of the Epistles and Gospels have particularly attracted my attention. I have read the rest of the book once, with pleasure and edification; but I have read the Epistles and Gospels over and over again, without ever being weary; and they leave upon my mind a double impression, for which I

* Manuel du Chrétien.

can hardly account, and which you, sir, must assist me in explaining.

On the one hand, as I have just told you, the extracts from the Bible, which I have read in the "Manual," appear to me to bear such an impress of truth, and almost of Divinity, as disposes me to believe that those who have written them were indeed inspired by God. But, on the other hand, I must confess, I see things so strange, so opposed to all our received notions, that I have great difficulty in persuading myself that they can be true, and that God can thus have spoken. To be sincere, I have great difficulty in persuading myself that God has ever spoken to man in any way. A revelation, prophets, miracles—excuse my frankness, but it appears to me hardly credible that such things can be; and though I am far from approving all that my husband says on this subject, yet his reasonings sometimes have more influence upon me than I desire. What is your opinion, sir? Are these marvellous accounts really true? I cannot doubt that you believe them. I know too well the uprightness of your character. A man like yourself would not yield without proofs. What are those proofs? Can you show me such as will completely satisfy my mind? It is not, as you see too well, very open to conviction; but neither is it closed against the light. However this may be, I am not one to

do things by halves. Having once entered on this examination, I will go through with it.

You will easily suspect why I do not address myself to the Curé of our parish. Mr. Alexis is a worthy man; but he is one of those inexperienced persons with whom the churches are now filled, and who know nothing beyond what they have learned at their seminary. I require a man who inspires me with more confidence, and on whose discretion I can depend. If you take the trouble to answer me, do not forget, I beseech you, that I am neither gifted with learning, nor superior intelligence. Speak to me with all plainness, and only supply me with arguments suited to my comprehension.

LETTER II.

THE ABBE FAVIEN TO LUCILLA.

The "trouble of answering" you! Ah, madam, speak not thus. No letter could give me greater pleasure than that which you have done me the honour of addressing to me. What can be more satisfactory to a minister of Jesus Christ, than to meet with a person who seeks after truth with as much sincerity as you do? And what occupation could be more conformable, both to my taste and

duty, than to assist you in this research, according to my feeble ability, but with devoted ardour?

God has begun to enlighten you : that he will finish his work, you need not doubt. It is true, you have adopted a different course from that pursued by the faithful in general. They usually begin by believing in the church; and then, on the faith of the church, they believe in the Holy Scriptures, whose Divine inspiration the church guarantees. But you, on the contrary, seem desirous to go from the Bible to the church. This could not fail to cause me some solicitude, were I not convinced that you will speedily return to the accustomed path, which is, without dispute, the safest and the most simple. You will soon be led to acknowledge, madam, that there is no well-grounded peace, but for him who refers to the church, as the child to its mother, the care of leading him to God. Prayer, experience, the study of your own heart, even the difficulties which you have already met with, will make you feel this much better than all my warnings can do, and will eradicate from your mind this residue of Protestantism, which has led you to reverse the order of conversion.

You desire that I should lay before you the proofs which demonstrate the Divine origin of our holy religion. This would be very easy, or rather the task would be superfluous, if you had

followed the course which I have just explained, and had, in the first instance, learned to submit your judgment in all things to the decision of the church. The Bible is a book inspired by God ; for thus teaches the church, which cannot mislead us. But in your present state, I see too well, that this reply will not satisfy you. I will not therefore refuse to give you one more conformable to your wishes, in order that my silence may afford no ground for suspicion. On no account would I give any cause of scandal to your dawning faith.

But, madam, the subject on which you consult me is too comprehensive for a letter. I shall be better able to explain myself in a conversation, when you can at once propose your doubts and difficulties. I intend, next week, to visit * * *. I shall not have time to pause on my journey there ; but on my return I shall have the honour of spending a short time at the castle ; and we can then deliberately converse on a subject which so deeply and so justly excites your interest.

PART I.

THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE.

CONVERSATION I.

The Abbé.—I am now quite ready, madam, to redeem my promise.

Lucilla.—You are indeed welcome, my dear sir. I am all impatience to hear you.

Mr. de Lassalle.—You wish to have a private interview, I perceive. I will withdraw.

Lucilla.—You will not interrupt us, my dear. You know that the subject of religion has deeply interested me of late. The Abbé, whom I have consulted, has kindly come to clear up some doubts which I had proposed to him. You, my dear husband, do not stand less in need of his assistance than I do. Let us both listen to him. Who knows? Perhaps the one whom we least expect will be the first to believe.

Mr. de Lassalle.—My love, the Abbé knows how much pleasure it always gives me to hear him; but it is better for you that I should retire. You know my sceptical views; and I should not like to be an obstacle to your conviction. The

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fear of perplexing you would embarrass me; and I should not express myself with the freedom necessary for a full discussion, which otherwise I neither fear nor fly.

The Abbé.—Neither, sir, does religion fear it. It is a favour, I ought to say a justice, which it always demands, but rarely obtains. Remain, I beseech you, and oblige me by expressing yourself without reserve. After what you have just said, your presence is necessary to me, in order that I may be able to produce conviction in the mind of Madame de Lassalle. In vain shall I reply to her objections. She will always imagine that I should not have succeeded so easily if I had argued with you.

Mr. de Lassalle.—I will remain, since you wish it; but remember, you must answer for the consequences. And do not take offence if I should express myself with perfect freedom.

The Abbé.—That is just what I require, and I will myself set the example. Politeness is very well in its place, but truth is before everything.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Well, sir, that we may understand one another, I will at once confess that I am a disciple of Rousseau. Voltaire and his school do not suit me. He has too much levity to please a man of thought, and too much malice to suit a man of worth. But my profession of faith is that of “Le Vicaire Savoyard.” Here you find gravity, solidity, eloquence. It bears

the stamp of sense and truth. I believe in God, and in a future state; but in revelation I have no great faith.*

The Abbé.—And I, sir, if I had to choose a master, would name Pascal. You will agree, I think, that he yields to no one in true eloquence; and for solidity of argument, and for character, he certainly equals Rousseau. Does he not? But let us leave men, and come to reasons. What, I ask, are those which prevent you from believing in a revelation?

Mr. de Lassalle.—I have a hundred to one. The first that presents itself to my mind is this: Every nation in the world pretends to a revealed religion. Each community has its own, which it has received directly from God, and which boasts its irresistible proofs, its miracles, its prophets. To believe them all is impossible, since they contradict and anathematize each other. But by what rule shall I choose? To believe one, and reject all the others!—excuse my frankness; but is it not a manifest partiality? I am more consistent. I reject the whole of them.

The Abbé.—Sir, your frankness by no means displeases me, but I think your logic is at fault. Let there be as many religions as you please, which falsely boast their Divine origin, this is no proof that a true revelation does not somewhere

* This “profession” occurs in Rousseau’s “Emilius.”

exist. Because there are twenty-three persons who, with yourself, lay claim to the inheritance of your cousin, Mr. de Lacombe, ought the judges thence to conclude that there is no legitimate heir, and reject your pretensions, with those of the other aspirants, without examination?

But this is not all. So many groundless pretensions convince me that a just claim does somewhere exist. Falsehood is in itself so futile, that it would never be able to make any way, did it not rest upon some known truth, by favour of which it is established in public opinion. These twenty-three competitors would never have thought of producing their false titles, had not the just claim of your family first suggested the idea to them. No one would have made counterfeit money, had not the true coin first existed; and charlatans in medicine only exert so much influence over the minds of people, because there are physicians and real remedies. You understand me. If God had not spoken to man, and if he had not spoken to him from the beginning, what Rousseau calls "the fantasy of revelations," would never have had its rise. And thus, instead of concluding that there is no true revelation, because there are so many false ones, we should say, on the contrary, that there are so many false ones, merely because there is a true revelation.*

* Pascal's Thoughts, second part; xvi. 7.

Mr. de Lassalle.—This reflection is quite new to me. I could easily find something to say in reply; but I do not think it is requisite. For, however this may be, it is sufficient that so many false revelations exist, to render it impossible to discriminate between them. Were there a true revelation, which I do not believe, it would be vain to attempt the discovery of it in the midst of so much confusion.

The Abbé.—It would not be so impracticable as you imagine. Much has been said concerning false religions, in order to throw discredit upon the true one. There are, however, but few which seriously and incontestably assume a Divine origin, in the same sense as does the religion of Jesus Christ. In other terms, there are few which present us with a book, whose author is well known, and which they pronounce inspired. Yet it is of these only that we must speak. It would be an idle task to allege against us, the nameless claims of such religions as have no written testimony, and of which any thing may be affirmed, because they are lost in the night of past ages. We must have something on which to rest our discussion: and probably you will not think of comparing the claims of the Christian religion with those of the Sybilline oracles, or of the lessons of Hermes Trismegistus.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Agreed: let us confine ourselves to those revelations which have a written

vidence, such as you have specified. Yet even in these we shall find the religion of Jesus Christ, of Moses, of Mohammed, of Zoroaster, of Sanchoniathon, of Confucius, of Brahma, of Odin, etc., etc.

The Abbé.—That I deny. You speak according to the philosophers of the last century, who were not always very scrupulous in their assertions. With the exception of Jesus Christ, Moses, and Mohammed, there is nothing solid in all that you have alleged. All the other books you have just named are of doubtful authenticity, or do not lay claim to inspiration. It is one thing to meet with scattered allusions to Divine aid, and another to find the repeated assurance of inspiration, in the full sense of the word, as is the case in the Bible, and the Koran. You speak of the revelation of Zoroaster. But even were not tradition involved in so much uncertainty, as to reckon as many as six different Zoroasters; and were not the authenticity of the Zendavesta a contested point, as is the case; still this book is rather a treatise of theology, philosophy, and other matters, than a professed revelation. The author is less a false prophet than a legislator; which is the character given him by Mr. Anquetil du Perron: and he may be compared to Solon and Lycurgus, who invoked the authority of the gods in support of their laws, without declaring themselves to be prophets. As to Confucius, he lays so

little claim to this character, that the books of which he is considered the author are especially distinguished by the fact, that no trace of the doctrine of a Divinity, or of a future state, is to be found in them.* Of Sanchoniathon we have only a fragment; and that is more than doubtful. It has passed through four different hands before it reaches us. It is to be found in the fathers of the church, who quote from Porphyry, (the declared adversary of Christianity,) who quotes from Philon of Biblos, who quotes the Phenician author. The Hindoos, indeed, possess books, which they believe to be inspired, but the origin of these books is any thing but authentic. The most impenetrable mystery covers their origin. No, sir; let us speak, if you please, of things that are clear and tangible. I find no religion, which claims Divine inspiration for well known writers, except these three: that of Moses, of Jesus Christ, and of Mohammed. And all these, you will observe, spring from the same source: for the religion of Jesus Christ is based on that of Moses; and Mohammed pretends to rest his claims upon those of the two others. The Old Testament, the most ancient book in existence, clearly proclaims its Divine inspiration; and it is from this common head that all accredited revelations, whether true or false, have their rise; and among

* Tennemann, Geschichte der Philosophie, s. 74.

these there are only three whose authority it is either possible or necessary to bring to the test.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Yet it will be requisite, at least, to study and compare these three religions, and these three books. How many men are capable of such a task?

The Abbé.—The labour would not be infinite. But it can be confined within narrow limits. The Judaic and Christian religions hold together in such a manner, that if the second is of God, the first, to which it bears testimony, must be of God also. And the Christian religion is so strongly opposed to Mohammedanism, that if the one is Divine, the other cannot be so. Without proceeding farther, here is sufficient proof of this: If Jesus Christ is God, according to the gospel, Mohammed cannot be a greater prophet than Jesus Christ, as the Koran teaches, without subverting the gospel from the beginning to the end. This being the case, sir, we can begin our investigation with the religion of Jesus Christ. If we find that its origin is Divine, every thing will then be said in favour of Moses, and against Mohammed. We will examine, in their turn, the claims of the two others. This order of proceeding is the more eligible, because you must agree that appearances, to say the least, are more in favour of the Christian religion than of either of the others. Our discussion is now much simplified, since the question is confined to one religion; and the do-

cuments connected with that religion relate to a period which is well known. So what becomes of all Rousseau's declamation on the impossibility of advancing a single step in the inquiry in which we are now engaged? His eloquence carries you away, in spite of yourself. But it is the eloquence of a sophist.

Lucilla.—I think, my dear, that you cannot refuse to comply with the Abbé's proposal. It is an advantage to both sides to limit the subject of discussion.

Mr. de Lassallé.—I am allowing you to arrange matters too much your own way, my dear sir. But, however, let us begin by examining the Christian religion, without prejudice to the others. —I do not deny that the gospel, especially in its morality, and in the character of its Founder, possesses features so admirable, that I have sometimes been half inclined to believe it. But this same religion contains things so incredible, that I can neither admit nor comprehend them. I would willingly say, with my favourite author, "If I find in its support proofs which I cannot overcome, I also find objections against it, which I cannot resolve. There are so many weighty reasons for and against it, that not knowing how to decide, I neither admit nor reject it." *In dubio abstine,** it is said. So I abstain.

* In doubtful matters suspend your judgment.

The Abbé.—In such a case as this it is impossible to do so. The gospel contradicts general opinion on many points. Whenever you remain undecided, you adopt the general opinion, and reject the gospel. What Pascal has said, in speaking of the existence of God, “Not to believe that God is, is to believe that he is not,” is still more true of the Christian religion. Not to decide in its favour, is to decide against it. “He that is not with me,” said Jesus Christ, “is against me.”

Mr. de Lassalle.—That may be, but it is not my fault if Christianity is repugnant to my reason.

The Abbé.—In what respect is it so?

Mr. de Lassalle.—Oh! in many things. For instance, that God should become incarnate; that Jesus Christ should be born of a virgin; that the innocent should suffer for the guilty, etc.: and that we must believe all this, whether we can or not, under the penalty of being burned in hell, through all eternity.

The Abbé.—Stop, my dear sir; let us proceed with order. That you find in the Christian doctrine things which astonish and alarm you, I can conceive. But the point which we must first elucidate, is this: “Is the gospel of God, or is it not?” Once convinced that God hath spoken, you will not, I think, refuse to admit what he asserts, whether it be conformable to your opinions or not.

For, in fact, God must know more about it than we do; and our reason cannot be degraded by yielding to the reason of its Creator. You tell your little son, Theophilus, that it is the earth which revolves, and not the sun. This is contrary to the judgment of his youthful intelligence, and even to the testimony of his eyes. He believes it, nevertheless, because *you* tell him so. Is he wrong?

Mr. de Lassalle.—He is right; he ought to trust my judgment rather than his own. Yet he is quite sure that it is his father who speaks to him; but I am not certain—I never can be certain—that God has spoken to me in the gospel. It is this first step that I find it impossible to take. For, indeed, how can I be sure of it? is it not by means of my reason?

The Abbé.—Undoubtedly.

Mr. de Lassalle.—But if my reason as much revolts at the doctrines of the gospel, as it is satisfied by its proofs, what must I do? In this case, my reason must be at fault either on the one hand, or the other; and might I not distrust it with equal justice, when weighing the arguments in favour of Christianity, as when scrutinizing its doctrines?

The Abbé.—No, sir. To weigh arguments, and to examine doctrines, are two very different things. Allow me to pursue my comparison. If the reason of Theophilus as much revolts at

hearing that the earth revolves, as it is convinced that his father is addressing him, what will he do? According to you, he might as well doubt that you have spoken, as admit that the earth moves.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Ah! sir, you jest. He only wants eyes to recognize his father; whereas, in order to study the movements of the stars, it requires intelligence more than he possesses, and observations which he is unable to make. Theophilus, young as he is, understands this distinction.

The Abbé.—Well said. I quite agree with you. *Ex ore tuo te judicabo*; that is, your own mouth shall condemn you. To weigh arguments, to ascertain whether miracles have been performed, or prophecies accomplished, only requires an examination of which reason is capable. But to estimate doctrines, to learn what God is, what are his nature, his will, his decrees, requires light which reason does not possess. Whether the Bible comes from God, or from men, is, if you will allow me the expression, a terrestrial fact, and one which falls under human observation. But every thing concerning the nature, will, and designs of God, is a celestial fact, quite out of the range of our experience.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Excuse me, sir, perhaps I do not understand you; but you seem to contradict yourself. I still come back to this simple

dilemma: Either reason is able to guide us, or it is not. In the first case, it does not need a revelation. In the second, it would be unable to verify and examine one.

The Abbé.—This is one of those general and absolute maxims, which, while they appear to simplify a question, only serve to render it more intricate. The fact is, that reason is capable of guiding us in some things, and incapable in others. It can guide us in all that concerns experience and observation; and this is all that we require in order to verify the authority of the gospel. But, with regard to the things of God, it cannot guide us; and this alone renders a revelation necessary. It is still like Theophilus, who can recognize his father, but who cannot study the motions of the planets. Let us make use of another comparison, more applicable to this part of our subject. A blind man cannot find his way by himself; but he can perceive whether the voice of the person who offers to lead him be that of a friend. He is incompetent, in the first case, because the organ of sight is wanting. He is competent in the second, because he possesses the organ of hearing. There is no contradiction in this. Neither is there any in me, sir, when I make use of the faculties which I possess, to ascertain whether the voice of the gospel is indeed the voice of God; and when I afterwards supply the place of those faculties, by allowing myself to be led by the voice which I

have ascertained to be Divine: distrustful till the requisite proofs are given; but, after that, perfectly confiding. For I am not ashamed to confess, that my finite intelligence does not stand less in need of light from God, than does the blind man of the eyes of his friend. "Reason," said St. Augustine, "would never yield, were it not convinced that there are cases where it ought to submit. It is, then, just that it should submit, when it concludes that it ought to do so; and that it should not submit, when it concludes that it ought not to do so. But we must take care not to deceive ourselves."*

Lucilla.—This is a very simple distinction, my dear, which never struck me before, and which overthrows the greater part of the objections of your "Vicaire Savoyard."

Mr. de Lassalle.—That I do not altogether deny. But still I do not think we have made much progress. It remains for us to inquire, whether our reason can indeed verify the authority of the gospel. The proofs of revelation are, and ought to be, supernatural; but our reason, which is according to nature, cannot appreciate any thing that is supernatural. You call this a "terrestrial" investigation, sir; but that I cannot understand. What is more "celestial" than a miracle?

The Abbé.—A miracle comes from heaven, it is true; but it is performed upon earth. It is in

* Pascal's Thoughts, second part, vi. 2.

this sense that I have called it a "terrestrial" fact, which falls under our observation, in contradistinction to the thoughts and decrees of God, which no man can see, and which cannot be known without a revelation. The design of miracles being to prove the truth of revelation, they do not require to be revealed themselves. They are seen exactly as a natural event; and those who have seen them bear witness to others. Did Jesus Christ rise again from the dead? This is a question of history, which human reason can resolve with as much accuracy as if the inquiry were, "Was Cesar assassinated in the Roman senate?" The only difference that ought to be made between a miracle and a natural event is, that justice requires more essential evidence in favour of the former, because it is more difficult to believe than the other, and because its results are more important. But the miracle being once proved, our reason, well aware that human nature is incapable of such achievements, is obliged to acknowledge the hand of God, and to confess that a religion accompanied by such signs must be of God.

Mr. de Lassalle.—This I would concede, had I seen the miracle with my own eyes. But the worst is, that others have seen for me; and those witnesses have not been men of my choice. I cannot but think of this expression of Rousseau: "How many men between God and me!"

The Abbé.—That is to say, in order to be more

free to reject miracles, you question the validity of the witnesses, by whose testimony alone they can be established. But observe the consequences: If you can be sure of nothing that you have not seen with your own eyes, to what would you be reduced? How many things are there which you only know by the testimony of others, and of which, nevertheless, you do not entertain the slightest doubt! What other proof have you that there is such a place as America, or that the history of Alexander is true? Did you ever think of doubting the one or the other? Only believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as you believe in America and Alexander, and I shall be satisfied. Suppose that a true prophet should rise up in France, at this present time, who should publicly work real miracles in Paris, in Lyons, in Marseilles: do you think that *no* means could be employed to attest their authenticity, which would convince surrounding nations, and future ages, who had not been eye-witnesses of the facts? Let us be candid. In reality you doubt the possibility of working miracles far more than you doubt the possibility of proving them, should they be performed. If you were not preoccupied by the thought, that miracles are impossible in themselves, you would soon be led to acknowledge that a certain evidence suffices to prove their truth; and that this evidence exists in favour of the miracles of the gospel.

Mr. de Lassalle.—I do not deny it. Miracles have always appeared to me impossible; because I think them unworthy of Him to whom they are ascribed. The beautiful order of nature, which miracles profess to interrupt, is the greatness and the glory of God. Could he not magnify one of his works, without detracting from another?

The Abbé.—Should it even be true, sir, that the order of the material world is the most beautiful of God's works, I do not see that the momentary suspension of its course can be any detriment to his glory. Not only would this suspension give more striking prominence to the habitual harmony of creation, but also afford an incontestable proof that God is its author and its master. It is not the glory of the work, but the glory of the workman, that is of importance. And what would you say, if a time should come, when the heavens and the earth shall be consumed with a fervent heat, to give place to "a new heaven and a new earth?" This time will come, sir; and this miracle of miracles, believe me, will detract nothing from the glory of God. But it is a great error to imagine, that the material world is the most glorious work of God. The most glorious work of God is the world of spirits, the moral world. I have no doubt you agree with Pascal in this beautiful thought: "All bodies, the firmament, the stars, earth, and its kingdoms, are not worthy to be compared with the meanest mind; for it knows all these things,

and it knows itself; but body is incapable of knowledge." The highest glory of the material world is, that it typifies and represents to us the phenomena of the moral world, of which it is, as it were, an emblem and a reflection. "The heavens declare the glory of God;" and his invisible perfections are clearly seen from the creation of the world, "being understood by the things which are made." Thus a tree, which grows and brings forth leaves and fruits in their season, is the emblem of a mind increasing in the knowledge of God, and expanding itself in light and works of mercy. In this point of view, comparisons may sometimes be arguments, in spite of the proverb: for the same hand created the two worlds, and the same design is observable in both. This being the case, it may enter into God's plan, to sacrifice, in some measure, natural order, to preserve and establish moral order. Such is the object of a miracle. It is like an opening wrought in the natural heavens, that we may perceive the spiritual heaven which lies beyond.

Mr. de Lassalle.—You have comparisons always at hand, sir; and all the graces of language seem at your disposal. But shall I tell you a reason, which of itself alone would lead me to determine against the Christian religion? It is the fact of its not being universally known. It is indeed predicted that it will penetrate, at some time or another, to the remotest nations; and

that it will overspread the whole earth. Predictions cost nothing. But in the mean while it allowed forty centuries to elapse before its appearance in the world; and during the eighteen centuries that have gone by since its appearance, hardly has it reached a quarter of the human race. How many men, how many families, how many nations, have perished without having heard of its existence! Is it credible, that a revelation, the knowledge of which would be indispensable to eternal salvation, should not be placed within the reach of every people? ay, more, of every man? What! from the first—or, if you like it better—from the fourth day of creation, the sun shines upon all men; and the light of revelation, so much more essential, is hidden from the greater portion of mankind!

The Abbé.—You here raise a difficulty, sir, more serious than any of the preceding. But it does not bear upon religion alone. It concerns the whole of God's plan regarding his free and intelligent creatures. The sun sheds his light over the whole world at once, because this is a thing over which man has no control. But in all that relates to intellectual or moral progress, where men can participate in the work, we every where see that God allows them to do so, and constitutes them "co-workers" with himself, to use the expression of Holy Scripture. Neither the light of civilization, nor the knowledge of the

arts, was at once promulgated among all nations. They were acquired by degrees, with the help of man, and the labour of centuries. Let us not complain of this. God confers honour upon man, when he thus associates him in some measure with his work. Why should we be surprised to see him following, with respect to religion, the same plan which he pursues in every thing else?

Mr. de Lassalle.—It is very different. For ignorance concerning the things which you have just named does not compromise salvation : whereas, ignorance in religion, according to your belief, prevents salvation ; and all these miserable heathen are lost for ever, because they do not believe in Jesus Christ, of whom they have never even heard.

The Abbé.—Let us exaggerate nothing. The gospel does not declare this ; neither does the church. “ God will judge the world with righteousness ; ” and none will be punished for being ignorant of that which they could not possibly know. If the heathen be condemned, it will not be for having refused to believe the gospel, but for having sinned against that natural light which is granted to every man. It is for this reason that St. Paul declares them to be “ without excuse,” in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans.

It is nevertheless true, I repeat, that we have met with a real difficulty ; and I do not profess to

be able to give you entire satisfaction on this point. But I strenuously deny that you have any reason, on this account, to decide against the Christian religion. You would have acted differently, had you been in God's place, and perhaps I also. This is all. But does it appear to you impossible that God should have designs which we cannot penetrate? And can he do nothing without having first submitted it to the approbation of his creature; and that creature sinful and fallible man? If you are so averse to the gradual progress of revelation, it is but just that you should indicate some other means of making it known. Admit, for a moment, that a revelation exists. How would you at once communicate it to every nation upon earth, without performing miracles more strange, and in far greater number, than those of the gospel? This is not all. You require that revelation should be within the reach, not only of every nation, but of every man; and in this you are consistent; for the reasons in favour of each are equal. Well, suppose that by some means, which I cannot conceive, the knowledge of a revelation should extend to every country in the world. Might it not happen that future generations would abandon the religion of their forefathers, as many Asiatic nations have left the religion of Christ for that of Mohammed? What would you do in this case? According to

your views, justice would require the whole series of miracles to be again performed, or nothing would be done. You would cover the earth with miracles, which you would renew every five or six generations; and yet you are their declared enemy. What a contradiction!

Mr. de Lassalle.—I could easily avoid the contradiction, by doing away with miracles, and having no revelation. But let us examine your hypothesis. Had there been a time when all men might have known the revelation, and had they afterwards abandoned it, their ignorance might have been imputed, if not to each individual, at least to the whole human race. The difficulty would not indeed be removed; but it would have quite another character than when it was by God's own act, not by any deed of man, that the knowledge of salvation was hid from three-fourths of mankind.

The Abbé.—And what would you say, if this time had once existed?

Mr. de Lassalle.—How? what do you mean?

The Abbé.—There has been a time when it depended upon man alone, whether all the families of the earth should receive, I do not say the gospel, but that portion of revelation which was given to the patriarchs, and which sufficed to save them. There has been a time when it depended on man alone that all men should be saved.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Explain yourself, sir. Of what period do you speak?

The Abbé.—Of the first day after the creation of the world. Immediately after Adam had sinned, and before the birth of his children, God gave him the first promise of grace,* which announced to sinful man a future Messiah, by believing in whom they might be saved: just as we may be saved by faith in the Messiah already come. Abel believed, and was saved. What Abel did, Cain might have done; the children of both might have done likewise; then their children's children: all, in short. It is impossible to follow this hypothesis, which, being realized, would have entirely changed the order of God's revelations. But, in fact, nothing on God's part has prevented the promise of grace, introduced into the world immediately after the fall, from being diffused wherever sin has extended. That this has not been the case, is the act of man; which is just what you required.

Lucilla.—This is admirable, sir! It is a ray of light!

Mr. de Lassalle.—Beware of enthusiasm, my dear. It is a bad guide in seeking the truth. I confess, nevertheless, that the Abbé presents me with reasons which I had never before heard, and which give me much matter for thought. But you

* Gen. iii. 15.

have just told us, sir—and that has not escaped me—that you find in the last objection I have made, a real difficulty, and one upon which you do not boast that you can give me entire satisfaction. I know the candour of this concession; but if by this avowal the advocate gains in my esteem, the cause may well lose. For if religion presents this difficulty, it may likewise present others; and even supposing you had removed this objection by your remarks, there may be others which remain in all their force. For my own part, I find many that I am unable to solve. There are certain questions which I could propose to you, and to which I defy you to give an answer that would fully satisfy me.

The Abbé.—I grant it.

Lucilla.—You grant it!

The Abbé.—Yes, madam; and this confession gives me no pain. On the eternity of God, on the incarnation of Christ, on grace, on everlasting punishment, and on many other points of Christian doctrine, you might ask me questions to which I should simply reply, “I do not know.” These are difficulties, inexplicable difficulties, if you like; but difficulty is not doubt.

Mr. de Lassalle.—This is certainly the first time I have ever heard revelation thus defended. What is your meaning?

The Abbé.—It is this. A thing may be so clearly demonstrated, that it cannot be doubted;

and yet it may give rise to questions which cannot be solved. The reason is plain. To know is one thing ; thoroughly to understand is another. We may know, we may be fully convinced of a thing, of which we can discover neither the *how* nor the *why*. Examples abound in every branch of human science. In natural history, we know that a grain of wheat, placed in the ground, germinates, grows, and produces an ear. But if you were asked how this takes place, could you tell? Suppose that a man who had no idea of the generation of plants, should hear you speak of it for the first time, what questions, what difficulties, what pretended impossibilities he would suggest! To all this you would be obliged to reply, in your turn, "I do not know:" and yet you would not for a moment doubt that the ear was produced by the grain of wheat. With you, then, as with me, difficulty is not doubt. In philosophy, I will ; and my arm rises. An immaterial substance communicates motion to matter. How can you account for this? I know not, yet I do not doubt. Mathematical science itself will furnish examples, with which you are better acquainted than I am. You demonstrate that the asymptote continually approaches the parabola, without their ever being able to meet. Again, you demonstrate that the earth, in its evolutions round the sun, arrived at the point where the shortest distance separates it from that luminary, and consequently

where the force of attraction attains its greatest power, suddenly flies off, as by an inconceivable caprice, at the moment when it seems about to precipitate itself therein; and that three months after, by a contrary caprice, it draws near to the sun, which one would imagine it was on the point of abandoning for ever? Who can account for this? But who can doubt it? Well, sir, the difficulties that we meet with in every other science, we must not be surprised to find in religion, which is the highest among them. We cannot explain a blade of grass, and yet we are astonished that we cannot explain God! It may be clearly proved to me, that the Christian religion comes from Him, without my being able to comprehend why he has not hitherto conferred its blessings upon every nation. It may be clearly proved to me, that Jesus Christ is at once God and man, without my being able to comprehend how the Divine and human natures are united in his person. It may be clearly proved to me, that eternal punishment exists, without my being able perfectly to understand its necessity.

After all, sir, I only act towards revelation as you do towards natural religion. Doubtless, it also has its mysteries; nevertheless, they do not shake your faith. Only to mention one. You cannot deny that evil exists in the world, since you see it with your own eyes. Can you explain how it came there? Of all mysteries this is at

once the most clearly proved, and the most inexplicable; and reason, constrained to admit this truth, is not very consistent in refusing to believe every other. Yes, sir, there are many things in religion which are above my comprehension, but this neither surprises nor distresses me. I expected it. I understand that I cannot understand. There are difficulties everywhere. It is impossible it should be otherwise, not only for us, but more or less for every created being. A creature to whom nothing would be incomprehensible, would stand in God's place; would see with God's eye; would be God. It is a contradiction in terms. No shadows are visible to him who contemplates objects illumined by the sun, from the sun itself; but we, who are upon the earth, see shadows. It is a necessity incident to our position. For the same reason, he who contemplates objects from the bosom of God, the centre and principle of creation, finds no obscurity; all things being seen, not only in their true light, but in their true connexion with every other. But for us, for every created being whatever, there are difficulties; there always will be. It is a law of our nature. It would be unreasonable, therefore, to seek a religious system absolutely free from them. We shall never find one. It neither exists for us, nor even for the angels themselves. We must be content to adopt that which, with the best proofs in its favour, presents the least difficulties,

Mark this, then, my dear sir. There are difficulties in the Christian's creed, but there are fewer than in that of the unbeliever: and reason alone would lead me to become a Christian; because, in order to reject the gospel, I should require a degree of credulity of which I do not feel myself capable.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Ah! this is new indeed! It is I then who am the most credulous of the two!

The Abbé.—Yes, sir, it is you.

Mr. de Lassalle.—But I can hardly run any risk in this respect, as I believe in nothing.

The Abbé.—This would be all very well, if you could believe in nothing. But you cannot help believing in something. For if the Bible is not of God, it is of men; is it not? The Bible is of God; this is my belief. The Bible is of men; this is yours. Then I maintain that your belief is surrounded by much greater difficulties than mine. Or, to amplify my idea, if there are difficulties in the way of my belief, there are absolute impossibilities in the way of yours; and if, in order to believe what I believe, I must bow down my head before God, which I do without shame, you, in order to believe what you believe, must contradict what is most evident in observation, in experience, and in history.

Mr. de Lassalle.—I am, indeed, curious to see how you will prove this.

Lucilla.—I am not less so than yourself, my

dear. But we must allow the Abbé a little time for repose. You had better postpone the rest of your conversation till the afternoon.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Very willingly; but I hope that reflection will not damp your courage, my dear sir. I will not give up till you have fulfilled your promise. You must prove to me, that I am more credulous than a believer.

The Abbé.—Make yourself quite easy. My conclusions are already formed; and I think I can entirely satisfy you.

CONVERSATION II.

The Abbé.—We did not proceed with much order, sir, in our discussion this morning. We touched upon many points, without thoroughly investigating any. You must agree that this is, in some degree, your fault. You have fixed upon me like a sharp-shooter. I have submitted to this without complaint, to have an opportunity of showing you, that there are no objections, which your philosophers urge with so much confidence, to which the gospel has not something substantial to offer in reply. It is now your turn to defend yourself, and mine to attack. I will try to do so with as much order as can be preserved in a conversation, and trust that you will second me in this endeavour.

Mr. de Lassalle.—I am quite willing to do so.

The Abbé.—The Bible exists. We must account for its origin. My explanation is this: God inspired the men by whom it was written, and revealed himself in it to mankind. This explanation has its difficulties. We considered them this morning, and I will not again revert to them. I will confine myself to a general remark on the nature of these difficulties. They bear almost entirely on points which depend upon the Divine will or knowledge. "It is inconsistent with the wisdom or the greatness of God, to reveal himself to men;"—or, again, "Supposing that God should purpose to reveal himself, it is incredible that he should have employed, to that end, the means which the gospel declares him to have done;"—or, "There are certain doctrines in the gospel, which are not in accordance with God's perfections." "God will not," "God ought not:" such are the unvarying objections of some; for they dare not say, "God cannot." In order to render arguments of this description conclusive, we should have a perfect knowledge of the Divine nature. Do you, sir, possess this knowledge? And when, instead of seeking to discover what God *has done*, we pretend, in the first place, to judge what he *ought to do*, may we not fear to deceive ourselves? This being the case, your objections are vague and unfounded. They are conjectures more or less probable; but nothing more. You may say, "I think," "I presume," but never, "I know." The

explanation I give of the origin of the Bible is in some respects incredible, according to your opinion; but it presents nothing that is absolutely impossible. It is not absurd.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Sir! I did not say that it was so.

The Abbé.—Well, I, sir, cannot be so polite as you are. Your explanation, according to which the Bible is an ordinary book, falsely claiming Divine inspiration, is surrounded with difficulties; bearing not on so mysterious a subject as the nature of God, but on what is best known and most clearly proved among men. This explanation is so strongly opposed to facts, and to common sense, that you cannot support it without falling into absurdities. My expressions are strong. I hasten to justify them. To throw light upon my view of the subject, let us leave generalities, and fix our attention on a single point. I choose prophecy; and more especially the prophecies concerning the Messiah in the Old Testament.

Let us first clearly put the question. In the Old Testament, the last pages of which were written five hundred years before the Christian era, I find a great number of predictions which refer to a future prophet. In the New Testament I find all these predictions fulfilled in the history of Jesus Christ. I explain this without difficulty, by saying that Jesus Christ was sent by God, who caused him to be announced to the world by inspired writers, a long time beforehand. But you,

who believe neither in the Divine mission of Jesus Christ, nor in the inspiration of the prophets, how do you explain the evident connexion between the prediction and the event?

Mr. de Lassalle.—Do not speak to me of prophecies! You could not make a more unfortunate choice. Of all your proofs it is that against which I have the greatest antipathy. I would rather, I think, admit miracles. That a man should announce events which are to happen in the course of five or six hundred years, and that they should take place exactly as he has said! Frankly, it is impossible.

The Abbé.—Impossible! That is a strong expression, and one which you have already granted that you have here no right to apply. This reminds me of a circumstance that took place on my journey, and which you must allow me to relate. Excuse the association. It is only an example, which I use, to make myself better understood. Yesterday, in ascending a hill on foot, I found myself walking side by side with one of your farmers, who was returning from the fair. We were admiring the setting sun. He made some remark, which led me to remind him, (you see that I again allude to the lesson of Theophilus,) that it is the earth which moves, and not the sun. I did not believe that I should have found a peasant in France who was not aware of this fact. But you should have seen his astonishment. “Impossible!” cried he, looking sted-

fastly at me, to see if I were jesting. When he was convinced that I spoke seriously, "Impossible!" he repeated. "I see the sun rise and set; and I am very sure that I feel the earth firm beneath my feet." I could not get him any farther. It was in vain that I brought forth proofs, which I nevertheless endeavoured to suit to his capacity. His mind was made up; he would listen to nothing I had to say. I ask, sir, which is the more credulous? this peasant, incredulous concerning the motion of the earth, and refusing to hear any thing contrary to his opinions? or you, believing in this motion, because you have observed, and seen, and heard? You see my object. If you have not examined the problem of the prophecies, I who examine, who listen, who observe, am less credulous than you, who have neither eyes nor ears for this inquiry; and who form a fixed opinion before you have consulted facts, by which you will not afterwards allow yourself to be convinced? I speak to one who is better acquainted with science and its history than myself. Is it not true, that science first deserved its name, from the period when the great Bacon laid down this principle: "First observe facts; and then seek the theory by which they may be the best explained?" Well, sir, in religion I proceed according to the method of Bacon; observing first, and afterwards drawing conclusions: and you, permit me to say, proceed according to

the ancient method, forming a theory, *à priori*, and leaving facts out of the question.

Mr. de Lassalle.—You are mistaken, sir, I assure you. Though I have not thoroughly studied the subject of the prophecies, they have nevertheless cost me some little reflection. But Rousseau presents an argument on this point, which I think decisive. Three things, whose concurrence is impossible, are necessary to my giving credence to the prophecies: “I must be witness of the prophecy—witness of the event—and thoroughly convinced that the event could not accidentally coincide with the prophecy.”

The Abbé.—I am delighted with this quotation. It will assist us in our elucidation. Rousseau doubtless wishes to have been witness of the prophecy, in order to be assured that there was no fraud in the prediction. He wishes to have been witness of the event, in order to be assured that there was none in the fulfilment. Lastly, he wishes it to be clearly proved to him, that the event does not accidentally coincide with the prophecy, without any preconcerted plan. Your author thus furnishes you with three ways of explaining the agreement of the event with the prophecy, independent of Divine interposition. First explanation. Either there has been no preconcerted scheme at all: it is an accidental coincidence; for if there has been any preconcerted scheme, it is not of God, but of men, who may have arranged the matter in two different ways.

Second explanation. They may have prepared the event to suit the prophecy. Third explanation. They may also have composed the prophecy to suit the event already transpired. A division worthy of the logic of Rousseau, and which appears to me to have exhausted the subject.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Excellent! You have thrown fresh light upon Rousseau's idea, which is admirably just and complete. I would not abuse the generosity of my adversary; but, as you say, "Truth before every thing." I am well fortified, I think, to resist your attack. I required but one stronghold, and I have three. I shall, indeed, be unfortunate, if you overthrow them all.

The Abbé.—Let us examine. One alone of the explanations would suffice you, I confess. You think them all admissible, this is what we must investigate. With which will you begin?

Mr. de Lassalle.—With the accidental coincidence; it is a very simple means. Why should we not believe that the pretended prophets of the Old Testament have risked certain predictions, which have been accomplished by a caprice of fortune? as it may happen that dice thrown at random may present a number which has been previously mentioned. However precise, however explicit may be the prophecy, this is not absolutely impossible.

The Abbé.—This last remark is a pure sophism. But you are not responsible for it, as it is furnished by Rousseau. Let us not dispute about words.

“This is not absolutely impossible ;” no, if by that you only mean that it does not imply a contradiction. But this is not the less impossible, *absolutely impossible*, with respect to prophecies, which possess a certain degree of precision and explicitness. Neither is it “absolutely impossible,” that printed characters, promiscuously shaken together and scattered, should have produced the *Æneid* ; nor that the order of the universe was formed by the accidental meeting of atoms in the regions of space ; and, nevertheless, he who believes this would be a fool. Do you know who says so ? Rousseau himself ; and, like the man who appealed from Philip drunk to Philip sober, I oppose Rousseau impartial to Rousseau prejudiced. “You may talk to me as much as you please of combinations and chances : what end will it answer to reduce me to silence, if you cannot persuade me of the truth of what you advance ? and how will you divest me of that involuntary sentiment, which continually contradicts you ? I confess that I ought not to be surprised that any possible thing should happen, when the rarity of the event is compensated by the great odds that it did not happen. And yet, if any one was to tell me that a number of printer’s types jumbled promiscuously together, had disposed themselves in the order of the letters composing the *Æneid*, I certainly should not deign to take one step to verify or disprove such a story. It may be said, I forget the number of chances ; but pray how

many must I suppose to render such a combination in any degree probable? I, who see only the one, must conclude that there is an infinite number against it, and that it is not the effect of chance."* Remark this, my dear sir; and the same principles which you think incontestable, when they are adduced to prove the existence of God, bear in mind when called upon to verify the arguments in favour of revelation. This is all I ask.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Agreed. There are certain combinations which cannot be the effect of chance; and Rousseau's language on the accidental coincidence of the event with the prophecy is perhaps rather absolute. Still, prophecies should be very full, very explicit, in order that this coincidence may not be admitted. For though we do not see letters thrown at hazard produce an *Æneid*, yet we sometimes meet with singular coincidences of this kind, and which it would be difficult to believe, if one were not constrained by facts to admit their reality. The newspapers, in giving an account of the great fire which took place at Sallanches, relate that the same catastrophe had already happened to this town, on an Easter Sunday, some centuries ago. They have also recently spoken of an old man, who died at the same age, and on the same day of the year, as his father, and as his grandfather did. How often do we hear of dreams accomplished, of presentiments fulfilled! You do not, however, on that account,

* Rousseau, *Profession de foi du Vicaire Savoyard*.

believe in either dreams or presentiments. They are the freaks of chance, left entirely to itself. With the help of human prudence, as might be the case in a prediction, it could do much more. The pretended prophet, by a skilful calculation, might discern the probable consequences of certain situations : or, again, he might clothe his predictions in language so equivocal, that they could hardly fail to be accomplished in one way or another. Thus the Delphic oracle did not run any great risk of compromising itself, in stating that Cræsus would ruin a great empire, if he declared war against Cyrus ; and Nostradamus, though no sorcerer, has made many predictions, which are realized in the same manner. But what is more astonishing, the augur Vettius Valens, who lived five hundred years before Christ, stated that the Roman power would last twelve centuries, if it were true that Romulus had seen twelve vultures, when he consulted the flight of birds with his brother Remus ; and, in effect, about twelve centuries elapsed between the foundation of Rome, and the fall of the western empire. Tasso sometimes announces the French revolution ; and Seneca, you doubtless remember, predicted the discovery of America, with a precision, which your Jewish prophets will find it difficult to surpass. I recollect to have read these words in the work of an English philosopher :* “ Show me in your Bible a prophecy as clear, and which has been as exactly ac-

* Collins.

complished, as that which Seneca made by mere chance, concerning the discovery of America, by Christopher Columbus, and I will believe."

The Abbé.—Among the coincidences you mention, there are some which are remarkable, it is true; especially the augury of Vettius Valens. As to the prophecy of Seneca, which one must indeed be prejudiced to compare with those of the Bible, there is every reason to think that it is a mere historical recital. It only affords a proof, among many others,* that America was not

* We will only quote two. The first is given by Diodorus Siculus, who expresses himself nearly thus :—" Opposite the coast of Africa, and in the Great Ocean, is found an island of considerable extent, and which is separated by an immense interval from the rest of the world. The soil of this island, in some parts flat, in others mountainous, is watered by large rivers. The cities are embellished with sumptuous edifices. The climate is so mild, that the trees bear fruit during the greater part of the year. In short, this favoured country seems more fitted for the abode of gods than men. This island, long unknown on account of its remoteness, was discovered in the following manner:—The Phenicians have, from time immemorial, undertaken long voyages and founded establishments in Africa, and in western Europe. Their prosperity increasing, they pushed beyond the Straits of Hercules, explored the coast of Africa, and founded gardens in Bettica. But one day, overtaken by a tempest, they were constrained to sail in the direction of this large island, where they landed after a long navigation. The fame of so beautiful and fertile a country was soon spread abroad, so that the Etrurians, then possessed of great naval power, formed the project of colonizing it. But they were prevented by the Carthaginians, who wished to reserve it as a refuge to which they might retire, with their families, should their own country be invaded."—Diod. Bibl., lib. iv. p. 299, 300. Edit. Rhodoman.

entirely unknown to the ancients, having been visited, at a very remote period, by the Phenician merchants. But allow me to ask, have you read the Old Testament ?

Mr. de Lassalle.—Not much. I must confess that my notions of it are rather superficial.

The Abbé.—That is a pity. It will then be less easy for me to convince you how different are the prophecies of the Old Testament, from those with which you dare to compare them. I hope, nevertheless, to be able to persuade you that this comparison is unjust, and your explanation inadmissible. What, in fact, do your examples prove ? That among so many false presages, or presentiments, which have remained unfulfilled, one or two have been found which the event has justified. These alone have been remembered ; and the others, by far the greater number, have been forgotten. This I can conceive, while I smile at the freaks of chance, or these successful attempts of human sagacity ; and I would seek no other explanation of the prophecies of the Old Testament which are accomplished in the New, did I see but one or two predictions among a thousand, which fortune might have amused itself in verifying, leaving all the rest to fall to the ground.

The second proof we have to adduce is the testimony of Avitus, who declares, in a work of Seneca himself, “that rich and fertile lands are situated in the Great Ocean ; and that again other shores and another world lie beyond.”—Avitus in Senec. Suasor, apud Horn. de Origin. Americ.

But the case is quite different. Here we have a body of prophecies, one resting upon another, all tending towards the same fact, the greatest revolution that has ever occurred in the history of mankind; and, lastly, the whole fulfilled in so wonderful a manner, that we defy you to cite a single one that has been belied by the event.

Mr. de Lassalle.—It is not sufficient to assert this, my dear sir. You must prove it to me, if you please.

The Abbé.—That is what I am about to do. Above all, observe that the Old Testament does not merely contain a few isolated prophecies. Its prophecies are so numerous, and so closely connected together, that one might regard the Old Testament, considered as a whole, everywhere anticipating a new order of things, as forming one great prophecy. As soon as sin had entered into the world, it announces, under the name of "the Seed of the woman," a Restorer, who will destroy the work of the tempter, and raise fallen man. From this passage, which is found in the third page of the book, the Old Testament is but, as it were, a pre-existing history of this Restorer, and of a certain kingdom which he will found on earth. The country and the people of the Messiah are already indicated in the twelfth chapter of Genesis. He was to be born of the seed of Abraham, in the land of Canaan, which God gave to Abraham for this very purpose. It

was this well-known promise which led Abraham to Palestine; which brought back his descendants after an exile of four hundred years; in short, which formed the Jewish nation. It is this which leads Pascal to say, that "there is a great difference between a book made by a private individual, and sent forth among a nation, and one which makes a nation itself." This commencement may give you some idea of the prominent part given to the Messiah throughout the Old Testament. Take from Roman history the augury of Vettius Valens, and the twelve vultures of Romulus, and what does it lose? Nothing more than an interesting anecdote; and many have learned the history of Rome who never even heard of Vettius Valens. But take from Jewish history the promise of a Messiah, and you annihilate it. You can no longer account for the origin, nor the religion, nor the manners, of this singular people, whose distinctive characteristic has always been, and still is, the expectation of a Messiah.

After the calling of Abraham, you may trace the course of prophecy throughout the whole of the Old Testament. You will see it unfold and display itself, from age to age, from prophet to prophet, during an interval of two thousand years, till at length it is accomplished in Jesus Christ, whose name signifies Jesus-Messiah. Each prophet, in his turn, seems only to have been sent to bear witness of him, and to add his link to the

chain of the narrative in which we find clearly indicated the people descended from Abraham, the tribe of that people, the family of that tribe, the time, the place, in which the Messiah should appear, with all that he would do, and all that would be done to him. Hence this profound expression in the Apocalypse, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy," Rev. xix. 10. And lastly, remember, that, besides all these prophecies, or rather this perpetual prophecy, the Old Testament contains a succession of facts and institutions which bear reference to the Messiah and to his work. I allude, especially, to those sacrifices which prefigured a sacrifice to come, and to which, according to Daniel, the Messiah would put an end. And, wonderful to relate! Jesus Christ did indeed put an end to them. They were constantly offered till his appearance, but ceased almost immediately after his death; yet the Jews have the same reason for offering them now, which they had before the Christian era, since they are still in expectation of the Saviour, for whom their fathers waited.

Such, sir, is the great prophetic view which pervades every part of the Old Testament, and which, in fact, has given to its writers the name of prophets. Do you wish to feel the truth of this yourself? Open it almost any where, and you will hardly find a page which does not afford a glimpse into futurity, or some direct reference to the Messiah and his kingdom. Moreover, this

characteristic of the Old Testament is sufficiently proved by the expectation in which we still see the Jews, who are the disciples of the Old Testament. I could show you that they looked for the Messiah precisely at the time of Christ's birth. But it suffices for my purpose, that they have always expected him ; and that, refusing to recognise him in Jesus Christ, they still expect him, as you yourself are witness. It is an unquestionable indication that they have found in their books, as I have just said, not only prophecies, but a constant and general prophecy, of the Messiah and his kingdom. Should a prophecy of this nature be fulfilled, it would be preposterous to explain it by an accidental coincidence, as might be the case with one or two isolated predictions. There can be no parity between the prophecies of the Old Testament and the augury of Vettius Valens, unless this augury had formed part of a series of presages, which had succeeded each other, century after century, from the foundation of Rome. What do I say ? from the beginning of the world ; and had announced, with ever-increasing precision, the fall of the Roman empire.

Lucilla.—I think, my dear, that the difference is most striking ; and that the Abbé has sufficiently established this distinction.

Mr. de Lassalle.—I do not exactly deny what the Abbé has just said concerning the prophetic character of the Old Testament ; but I reject the conclusion which he thinks may be drawn from

it. That this book contains a compact and continuous prophecy, I allow. This you have proved; and I was already, in some degree, aware of it. But the generality and the extent of the prophecy do not prevent its accidental fulfilment. It is simply a single prophecy, reproduced under different forms; the prophets having copied one another. Why should it not fall in with the event, as well as the augury of Vettius Valens, or the prediction of Seneca? The very generality of the prophecy is a facility in its favour. That which is more general is also more vague, and more easily adapted to any application it may chance to encounter.

The Abbé.—This would all be very well, if we found in the Old Testament nothing but a general prophecy. But on this general prophecy rise and rest a multitude of special prophecies, which enter into the detail of events, and characterise the Messiah with a precision which could find no coincidence in mere fortuitous occurrences. So true is this, that if you chose, you might collect materials for writing a brief history of the Messiah from the prophets alone: a history which you would afterwards find in the New Testament, accomplished, fact for fact, in Jesus Christ. Do you inquire at what time the Messiah will appear? Daniel predicts (ix. 24—27,) that he will come seventy weeks, (weeks of years,) or four hundred and ninety years after the going forth of

a commandment to release the Jews from their captivity, and to rebuild Jerusalem ; and Haggai, (ii. 6—9,) that he shall honour the second temple with his presence. (See also Mal. iii. 1.) Jesus appears at the appointed time, reckoning from the edict of Artaxerxes, and often shows himself in the second temple, which was burned by Titus forty years afterwards, as Daniel states in the same passage. In what place will he be born? Micah informs us, (v. 2,) that it is in the tribe of Judah, in the little town of Bethlehem. From what family will he descend? To this a whole train of prophets reply, that he will descend from Abraham, (Gen. xii. 3 ; xxii. 18,) in the line of Isaac, (Gen. xxvi. 3, 4,) then of Jacob, (Gen. xxviii. 14 ; Num. xxiv. 17,) then of Judah, (Gen. xlix. 10,) and thus in succession to David. (Isa. xi. 1 ; Jer. xxxiii. 15.) You remember that Jesus was born at Bethlehem, and of the family of David. Do you wish to know the events of his life, with those which will precede his birth, and succeed his death? All this is written in the Old Testament : and if you connect the predictions which I am about to read, with the corresponding passages in the Gospels, which I will also show you, you will find the accomplishment as exact as the prophecy is circumstantial. He shall send a prophet, who will prepare the way before him. (Mal. iii. 1 ; Isa. xl. 3—5.) You recognise John the Baptist. He shall be despised of men, Messiah though he is, and shall present an unheard-of

union of greatness and abasement. (Isa. liii.) This celebrated chapter has been called a fifth Gospel. He shall enter into Jerusalem seated on an ass. (Zech. ix. 9, compared with Matt. xxi. 1—9.) He shall be betrayed by a friend, and sold for thirty pieces of silver, which shall afterwards be paid to a potter. (Psa. xli. 9; Zech. xi. 12, 13, with Matt. xxvi. 15; xxvii. 3—7.) He shall be condemned as a malefactor; and he shall submit to his unjust sentence with lamb-like resignation. (Isa. liii. 6, 7, 12, with the entire account of the passion.) They shall pierce his hands and his feet; they shall part his garments among them, and cast lots upon his vesture. (Psa. xxii. 16—18, with John xix. 18, 23, 24.) He shall be laughed to scorn in the midst of his most fearful agonies. (Psa. xxii. 2, 7—9, with Matt. xxvii. 39—44.) They shall give him to drink vinegar mingled with gall. (Psa. lxix. 21, with Matt. xxvii. 34.) Though destined to be buried with the wicked, he shall, on the contrary, make his grave with the rich. (Isa. liii. 9, with Matt. xxvii. 38, 57—60.) When all will seem lost, then his triumph shall begin. After his death his work shall be crowned with full success; and his doctrine, rejected by the Jews, shall subdue kings and nations, and at length cover the whole earth. (Isa. liii. 10—12; xlix. 1—8; Gen. xxii. 18.) Are these, sir, vague and equivocal predictions, which may be applied

to any one, or which chance alone might undertake to realize? Show me, in all history, another man, besides Jesus Christ, to whom the whole of these facts, though they form but a small portion of the prophecy, may be applied: a man born in Bethlehem, of the family of David, at the time when the second temple was in existence, but shortly before its destruction; who was betrayed, sold for thirty pieces of silver, put to an ignominious death, like a felon, and nevertheless buried like a rich man; in short, who was at once the most despised and the most honoured of mankind; and who, rejected during his lifetime, and believed in only after his death, has produced a universal revolution in the world.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Sir, I am no sophist. I will not maintain that the fulfilment of prophecies so explicit as these can be explained by chance, like that of the augury of Valens, or the presentiment of Seneca. But that which I cannot help contesting is, the meaning you give to the prophecies of the Old Testament. I do not consider them in the same light that you do. There is hardly one that is expressed in clear and natural terms; and the greater part are so involved in the recital of contemporary events, that it is very difficult to distinguish what refers to the present, from what refers to the future. Why is not the language of prophecy as lucid as that of history itself? Take, for instance, the first three or four predictions

you have just shown me. How do I know that this "Desire of all nations," of whom Haggai speaks, or "He that is to be Ruler in Israel," whom Micah tells us will be born in Bethlehem, is indeed the Messiah? Neither can I be sure whether he is referred to in "the Seed of Abraham," nor, especially, in this "Star coming out of Jacob," to which you may give whatever interpretation you like. How can I know that the "seventy weeks" of Daniel are weeks of years? All this, I must confess, appears to me rather obscure; and in order to give any weight to your argument, it ought to be clear as the day.

The Abbé.—You here raise a real difficulty. This is the only point in my argument that is open to attack; and I feel the force of your observation. Were you of a disputatious spirit, I do not even know whether you would not escape me here; but I am sure that such is not the case. I willingly do you this justice, and believe you will be fully satisfied by the considerations I am about to offer.

In the first place, I agree that the language of prophecy is not, in general, so clear as that of history. Why? Various reasons have been given. On this subject we can only form conjectures; and I confine myself to a single observation. This partial obscurity of prophecy harmonizes | 2
with the whole of God's providential plan. For, in the first place, God lays no restraint on the

freedom of man ; and he would be constrained to do so with respect to certain prophecies, if they were such as you require ; because the enemies of the faith might then undertake to prevent their accomplishment. They must be so situated, that they can fulfil the prophecy without being aware of it themselves. Besides, God does not force man's conviction. He does not render truth so self-evident that there remains nothing for man to do. On the contrary, he every where obliges him to seek and to pursue it, inasmuch as religion consists rather in the feelings of the heart, than in the opinions of the mind. This remark is not applicable to revealed religion only : it is the same with natural religion. The existence of God, and the immortality of the soul, of which you do not doubt ; do they seem to you as clear as the day ? If such is the case, the profession of the " Vicaire Savoyard " might have been much shorter than it really is. Do not, then, require in favour of revelation evidence which reason itself does not possess ; and since you are satisfied with proofs in favour of the existence of God, and of a future state, which suffice to persuade a candid mind, be satisfied if prophecies are sufficiently clear to enable you to ascertain, after the event, that they had previously announced it. We have this in the Old Testament ; and we have still more : we have even all that is requisite to foresee the event ; at least when it is of great importance.

Besides, sir, there are in the Old Testament, prophecies much less obscure than the generality of those concerning the Messiah. On this point they could hardly have been so clear as you desire, without the Christian religion being proclaimed at the same time as the Jewish, which would have interrupted the progressive march of revelation. They are involved, you say, in the relation of contemporary events. This is true ; but it is by this means that they are introduced. What they thus lose in clearness, they gain in depth and extensiveness. But I could show you other prophecies, much clearer than these, and nearly such as you require. A brief history of Egypt has been written from the prophecies ; and the predictions of Daniel concerning the four monarchies gave Rollin the plan of his Ancient History. But you are not yet prepared to bear prophecies so precise. You now complain of a want of clearness : you would then complain that there was too much. “ This is not prophecy,” you would say ; “ it is history ;” and its very clearness would cause you to doubt. I speak from personal experience. I have found more faith required to believe prophecies perfectly intelligible, than to believe those which remained slightly veiled till the time of the event. Because we feel that, generally speaking, the language of prophecy neither can be, nor ought to be, as lucid as that of history. Shall I tell you where you will find

prophecies in exact accordance with your ideas, and clear as the day ? In the apocryphal writings. There is a book, falsely ascribed to Isaiah, and entitled, " The Ascension of Isaiah." There you will find announced in detail, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, with the number of his disciples, their labours in this world, etc. You might imagine you were reading the Acts of the Apostles. But here it is that you feel the difference between the work of God, and the work of man : and I have not the least doubt, that if the prophecies of the Old Testament had been written after the event, they would have been sufficiently clear to betray their human origin, and to destroy all confidence in their authenticity. Such as they are, they possess a degree of light which, I repeat, enables you, not only to recognise the event which they predict—which would suffice—but also to foresee it.

We must here make an important observation. If the prophecies of the Old Testament are wanting in clearness, when each is considered separately, the case is altered, sir, when they are regarded as a whole, and each one is viewed in its connexion with prophecy in general. What would otherwise be obscure, is no longer so when placed in this light ; because the promise, which is every where found, dispels whatever uncertainty might remain. Thus when it is said, " He that is to be Ruler in Israel," will be born in

Bethlehem, we cannot tell, you say, whether the Messiah or some Jewish prince is meant. I might reply, that the words which follow, "Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," are sufficient to clear up any doubts on this subject; since the Messiah only is the everlasting King. But should this elucidation be withheld, still there could be no ambiguity here, in the Old Testament, which speaks from the beginning to the end of a Messiah to come. The very fact, that you find no one else, to whom this passage may be applied, compels you to apply it to the Messiah himself. The same thing may be said of "the Desire of all nations," who should appear in the second temple. We are constrained to allow that this refers to the Messiah, even were we not convinced by what precedes and what follows; especially when we connect it with this prediction of Malachi, (iii. 1 :) "The Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in." The same observation holds good respecting the words used to designate the line from which the Messiah should descend: "The Seed of Abraham;" "the Star of Jacob." The word "star" is used in the figurative style of the prophets, to signify a man who exercises high authority, or who occupies a brilliant position. This "star," which "shall come out of Jacob," might apply to any one in an ordinary book; but

in the Old Testament it can be no other than the Messiah. Besides, all these predictions hold together; and when I see clearly announced, (Jer. xxxiii. 15,) that the Messiah will descend from David, I am completely assured that I have rightly interpreted "the Star of Jacob," and "the Seed of Abraham;" since descending from David, he must necessarily descend from Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham. As to the "weeks" of Daniel, that is another question. It is an understood fact, that "day" is used for "year" in prophetic language. All Hebrew dictionaries are agreed on this point, even those which are made by unbelievers. Daniel may have been more easily led to express himself thus, as he places the seventy weeks of years, which were to follow the captivity, in contrast with the seventy years during which the captivity had lasted.

Mr. de Lassalle.—I see the bearing of your observation, on the light which special predictions derive from general prophecy. But I am not convinced. I believe that if I had lived before Christ, and if I had been a Jew, a believing Jew, I should have had great difficulty in foreseeing, as you say, the history of the Messiah, even in its most striking features.

The Abbé.—Your remark is most opportune. You remind me of a very simple argument which I had overlooked, and which will enable me to dispense with every other. The very thing which

you imagine impossible, has been done ; and the best proof that the prophecies are not involved in such obscurity, is, that they were understood before the event.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Understood ! and by whom ?

The Abbé.—By the Jews. This fact alone, that the Jews have always expected a Messiah, proves, at least, that they found no obscurity in the general prophecy of the Old Testament. And you will soon see that they found none in the more important of the special prophecies. They understood that the Messiah would appear at the time when Jesus Christ was born. They understood this so well, and so long before the event, that they had time to communicate their impressions on the subject to the surrounding nations, and throughout the whole extent of the Roman empire. The history of the New Testament shows us, that this expectation generally prevailed among the Jews ; and profane historians inform us, that its fame had reached even Rome, where they knew not what to think of it. You have not, perhaps, forgotten this celebrated passage of Tacitus, in his narration of the siege of Jerusalem, (Hist. v. 13 :) “ If we may believe the assertion of a great number of men, it was written in the ancient books of the priests, that just at this time the east would acquire the preponderance, and the empire would fall into the hands of men coming from Judea.” This testimony is corroborated by that of Suetonius, who says, speaking also of the reign of

Vespasian, (i. 4.) "It was an old, firmly established and prevalent opinion, throughout the east, that soothsayers had promised the empire, at this very epoch, to men coming from Judea." The Jews had also understood that the Messiah would descend from the house of David; for they called him, as we see in the New Testament, (Matt. xxii. 42,) and they still call him, "the Son of David." They had understood that he would be born in Bethlehem, for they gave information to that effect to Herod, on the faith of the same prophecy of Micah, which you did not think sufficiently clear; and it was for this reason that Herod caused the children of Bethlehem to be slaughtered, imagining this "King of the Jews," whom every one expected, to be a temporal sovereign, who would succeed him in authority. And as you have spoken of the "Star of Jacob," I will add, that it was clearly understood to mean the Messiah; since the false Messiah, Coziba, took the name of Barcochab, or "Son of the star," in allusion to this prophecy of Balaam.*

After this, sir, I have reason to conclude, that the prophecies of the Old Testament are not so obscure, but that we can affirm they agree with the history of Jesus Christ; and this agreement, once acknowledged, cannot be explained by an accidental coincidence. The prediction is, at the same time, too full and too circumstantial. The

* Basnage, History of the Jews, p. 315.

general prophecy will not allow us to mistake the sense of the special prophecies, which it concentrates on the Messiah and his work; and the special prophecies, in their turn, will not allow us to magnify the first impostor into the Messiah, since they characterize him too exactly to admit of a mistake. When united, they form a perfect whole—a mass, a body of predictions, whose accomplishment we cannot possibly ascribe to accident; especially, when you consider that, while so many points are verified in Jesus Christ, not one is contradicted. As to myself, I assure you that, were I in the present case to imagine a fortuitous coincidence, I should consider myself as falling into error, impossibility, and absurdity. I had rather believe the miracles of God, than those of chance; and if I can find no other explanation of the agreement of the event with prophecy, to escape the imputation of credulity, I see no refuge but in faith.

Lucilla.—My dear, I am afraid your first stronghold is in danger.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Oh! you, my love, are always ready to yield at the first shot. However, we have a considerable force in reserve. I will suppose that the agreement of the event with the prophecy cannot be explained without a preconcerted plan. I say that this plan is of men, and not of God. In fact, this hypothesis is more probable than the other; and I ought to have

chosen it in the first place. Fraud has been employed in this instance, as in every revelation, past, present, and to come. Pious fraud! to this we know the church is no stranger.

The Abbé.—We are not speaking of the church, but of prophecy: let us not digress, I pray. It is no longer by chance, but by fraud, that you undertake to explain prophecy. Fraud! It is very evident from this unworthy supposition, that you are no better acquainted with the New Testament than with the Old. Had you read it, even in a cursory manner, you must have been struck at every page by a candour, a simplicity, a naturalness, not to be found in the same degree in any other book; and you would have acknowledged, that the apostles had no other reward to expect for so infamous a deception, than persecution and martyrdom. Upon your hypothesis, how inexplicable is their conduct and language! Truly, you only leave one difficulty to encounter a greater. “The gospel bears an imprint of truth so great, so striking, so inimitable, that its inventor would be more wonderful than its hero.” You recognise the quotation? However, for the sake of argument, I will consent to do violence to my feelings, and my reason; and will suppose that the apostles intended to deceive men concerning the prophecies. Could they do so? This question will suffice me. How would they have set to work?

Mr. de Lassalle.—In one of the two ways

which you suggested when amplifying Rousseau's original idea; they either made the event for the prophecy, or the prophecy for the event.

The Abbé.—Which do you choose?

Mr. de Lassalle.—They adapted the event to suit the prophecy. The prophecy existed in the Old Testament. They had only to make the event agree with the prophecy, by purposely arranging it to that effect. Is there any thing incredible in this?

The Abbé.—I see with pleasure that you no longer find prophecy so very obscure; for, before the event could be arranged to suit it, it must necessarily have been understood. But pray explain yourself. Did they take measures in order that the predicted events might really occur? or did they relate them as having happened, when, in fact, nothing of the kind had really come to pass? Did they *direct* history, or did they *invent* it?

Mr. de Lassalle.—Both: there are so many ways of deceiving men! We have more than one string to our bow.

The Abbé.—As many as you please; but remember one good string is better than two bad ones.

Mr. de Lassalle.—But, in fact, why could not the principal events in the life of Jesus Christ have been so directed as to correspond with prophecy? You tell me, for instance, that the

Messiah, according to Zechariah, would enter Jerusalem seated on an ass. Could not the disciples of Jesus take an ass, and seat their Master upon it, that they might afterwards be able to say that the prediction of Zechariah had been fulfilled in his person ?

The Abbé.—Agreed : they might have done so in this instance, and perhaps in several others. But could they have done so for the whole prophecy ? Consider, sir, a prophecy comprehending an entire system of predictions, some relating to the most important events, others to the minutest circumstances : a prophecy bearing not only on every fact connected with the life of a man, and that man the Messiah ; but, also, on what would occur both before and after his appearance. The impossibility of this is evident. There were predictions concerning the infancy of the Messiah, concerning his birth, the mission of a prophet who would precede him. Had they chosen Jesus to be the pretended object of these prophecies even before he came into the world ? Did they purposely cause him to be born in Bethlehem ? Did they send before him a false precursor, and make a John the Baptist in anticipation of the time when they should make a Jesus Christ ? There were predictions which announced the Messiah as “a man of sorrow, and acquainted with grief,” and as destined to suffer a fearful death. Were they so assured of Christ’s complacency,

that, after having chosen him without his consent, they could depend upon him to sustain his part to the end, and cause himself to be hated, persecuted, arrested, crucified? But there were, also, many predictions concerning the enemies of the Messiah. When the Roman soldiers nailed Christ's body to the cross, and pierced his hands and feet, according to Psalm xxii.; when the scribes and Pharisees accomplished to the very letter another part of this Psalm, by laughing him to scorn on the very cross;* when the Jews rejected Christ, and clamoured for his death; and then, a few days after, were converted by thousands, and adored him as their Lord and their God; did they thus act in obedience to the apostles? and did a few Galilean fishermen thus dispose at will of the sanhedrim, of the Jewish people, of Pilate, and

*“But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me, laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him, let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him,” Psa. xxii. 6—8. “And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God,” Matt. xxvii. 39—43.

of the Roman empire? Apply the same hypothesis to the history of our own time, and you will then feel how utterly insupportable it is. Suppose a manuscript should be discovered, bearing the date of the twelfth century, in which it should be predicted, that in the course of six hundred years a man should be born at Ajaccio, in Corsica, whom a terrible revolution would make master of France; who would carry his victorious arms from the Rhine to the Nile, and fill the whole world with his fame; who would conquer united Europe at Marengo, Austerlitz, and Jena; who would be suddenly arrested in the midst of his career; who would find his power annihilated in an expedition against a great northern monarch; and who, lastly, after a brief exile, would reascend the throne, again be driven from it, and be sent to die in a remote and desolate island. Suppose farther, that certain persons should thence conclude, that the author of this manuscript possessed the gift of prophecy. What would you think of the man who should attempt to silence them by saying, "I can explain the mystery. All this is nothing but a preconcerted scheme. A secret society, aware of this prediction, and wishing it to be considered as a prophecy, have originated all these events for the purpose of verifying it."

Mr. de Lassalle.—It is true that this direction of events is more difficult than I imagined. It

would be less so to invent them; and this the apostles might have done. There is nothing impracticable in their having related a tissue of false occurrences, such as would agree with the prophecy. They might have said that Jesus was born at Bethlehem, though he was born elsewhere; that he was crucified, though he died a natural death; and that his doctrine was rejected during his life, and received after his death, though there might be no truth in either of these assertions. What hindered them from inventing?

The Abbé.—What! Every thing. History, which at an age so well known as that of Jesus Christ—the age of Augustus, Tiberius, Tacitus, Suetonius—would never have accredited so flagrant a lie; while nowhere do we find the statement of the apostles contradicted; nowhere do we find the slightest trace of the real facts, supposing your hypothesis to be true. The Jews, especially, in the midst of whom Jesus Christ had lived, in whose presence the apostles first began to preach,* and who were as much opposed to the disciples as they had been to the Master; would they, I ask, have allowed them to ascribe to Jesus Christ, not only certain actions, but a complete history, without protesting against so shameless an imposture? And while they sought every opportunity against them,† would they

* Acts ii. .

† Acts iv. v.

have neglected so easy a means of confounding them before all the people. Sir, excuse my frankness ; these are thoughts which may, indeed, suggest themselves to the mind of a man who looks out for a new hypothesis, the moment his former one fails him, but which cannot stand before a quarter of an hour's calm reflection. To revert to the imagined prophecy of Napoleon. Would you not consider that man a fool, who affirmed that the whole history of this distinguished personage was arranged expressly for its fulfilment ? But should you have a more favourable opinion of him, who would wave the difficulty, by saying that this history was merely a fiction, composed by writers whose interest it was to verify the prophecy ; and that Napoleon never existed ; or, that he had never performed the actions which have been ascribed to him ?* Yet this assertion would not be more tenable than that of the infidel, who accuses the apostles of having invented the life of their Master. In some respects, I affirm that it would be even less so. For, besides the fact, that no one would be so deeply interested in contradicting the false historians of Napoleon, as would have been the Jews in contradicting those of Jesus Christ. The life of Christ occupies a far

* See the witty pamphlet of M. Pérès, in which he proves the non-existence of Napoleon, by the same arguments which are used by Dupuy, against the personal existence of Jesus Christ.

different place in the annals of the world than does even that of Napoleon. What! ancient and modern history, which unite in bearing testimony to Jesus Christ, would they unite in bearing testimony to an imaginary being? and would they both rest upon a tissue of falsehoods, owing to the inconceivable audacity of the apostles, and the still more inconceivable silence of their adversaries? Leave such hypotheses to a Dupuy, or a Volney; and be satisfied with the scepticism of Rousseau. He, at least, never fell so low; and you cannot have forgotten this beautiful passage: "Shall we say that the history of the gospel was invented at will? My friend, it is not thus that men invent; and the deeds of Socrates, of which no one doubts, are less authentic than those of Jesus Christ. In fact, you evade the difficulty, without removing it. It would be more inconceivable that several men should agree to fabricate this book, than that a single one should be found who could furnish its subject."

Mr. de Lassalle.—I am not convinced that the difficulties in the case of Jesus Christ would be greater than in that of Napoleon: but even were they the same, I confess they are quite enough to render my position untenable. But in the supposition of this manuscript concerning Bonaparte, I should say that the pretended prophecy had been made after the event. This I maintain to be the

case with respect to the prophecies of the Old Testament.

The Abbé.—That is quite another thing. We are then agreed that your second explanation is still more inadmissible than the first; and that it is impossible to suppose that the event was made for the prophecy. But I have another question to ask you on this subject: Is it necessary to have seen Napoleon, in order to be convinced of the falsehood of the suppositions which I have just made concerning his history?

Mr. de Lassalle.—Certainly not.

The Abbé.—Is it necessary to have seen Jesus Christ, in order to acknowledge the falsehood of the analogous suppositions which you have made concerning his history?

Mr. de Lassalle.—The one is not quite so clear as the other; yet I confess it is sufficiently so.

The Abbé.—Acknowledge, then, that one may be perfectly sure of an event, without having seen it; and that Rousseau was utterly unreasonable in saying, that he would not admit the truth of any prophecy, unless he had witnessed its accomplishment. He has thought fit to proclaim the necessity of a condition which is not to be found in prophecy; which all generations could not find there; and then, because this condition is wanting, he refuses to believe. This is prejudice, not candour. Let us now examine your last explanation.

Mr. de Lassalle.—Really, sir, you tell me so many things of which I was not previously aware, that I begin to feel rather uneasy. Nevertheless, I think that, in this instance, I only make a reasonable supposition. If men cannot do what they like with history, and with their fellow creatures, they can with books. Paper is discreet, and does not complain. We read of many interpolations of this kind in the history of letters. Besides, I do not suppose that the whole of the Old Testament was written after the death of Christ. I only suppose that the apostles intercalated prophecies relative to the Messiah, which they inserted after the event.

The Abbé.—You forget, sir, the place occupied by the prophecies in the Old Testament. They are found in so great a number, they form so connected a whole, they are so involved in the contemporaneous history, that it would have been easier to remake the entire book, than to insert them after the event. Besides, there was one circumstance which greatly increased the difficulty. When the ten tribes which formed the kingdom of Israel separated from that of Judah, they carried with them the five books of Moses, the only part of the Old Testament then collected. These books have been preserved to the present day, by the Samaritans, who are descended from the Israelites. The apostles, not content with changing the Hebrew Old Testament, must also have falsified

the five books of Moses, as possessed by the Samaritans, the declared enemies of the Jews. But this is my least difficulty.

Do you not think, sir, that if the apostles had composed the prophecies after the event, they would have made them clearer? You complain that they are not sufficiently precise. Believe me, an impostor would have taken care to avoid this reproach. You must not take it ill if I turn your own weapons against you. This is my second difficulty.

Here is the third. If the prophecies of the Old Testament were made after the event, how is it that the Jews understood them before? Where had they read that a Messiah was promised them; that he would appear at an appointed time; that he would be born in Bethlehem; that he would descend from David, etc.? Had they read these things in predictions which did not exist, and which were forged many centuries later? You seem embarrassed by this reflection: let us leave it, and proceed to my last difficulty, which I am impatient to submit to you.

“The apostles,” say you, “have greatly altered the text of the Old Testament. Paper is discreet, and does not complain.” But you forget that this paper might fall into the hands of indiscreet men, disposed to complain. Who were the natural guardians of the Old Testament? The Jews, the priests, the scribes, the rulers of the

synagogues; that is to say, the murderers of Jesus Christ. It is well known, that the Jews carried their respect for their sacred books even to superstition; so much so, that if, in copying the Scriptures, they met with a letter larger or smaller than the rest, they carefully preserved these differences, which are still to be found in our Hebrew text, and in which their doctors saw singular mysteries. According to your account, they now for the first time lay aside this excessive veneration, and without scruple, consent to the most barefaced interpolations. And in whose favour do they make this enormous exception? In favour of Christ's disciples, who attempt to prove by this lie, that He whom these same Jews have just crucified is the Messiah and the Son of God!

But granting that the apostles had gained——with what? We know that the apostles had neither money nor credit; but, however, granting that they had gained the guardians of the Old Testament in Jerusalem; granting that they had bought the silence, the concurrence of the sanhedrim, of the priesthood in this city, from the first to the last of its members; the opportunity, doubtless, was favourable; they took advantage of the time when these furious enemies of Christ were discharging the remains of their wrath on his disciples, were dispersing them on every side, were stoning St. Stephen, were persuading Herod to decapitate St.

James. I grant that the Old Testament was altered at Jerusalem to suit the Christians. I concede much, but still you are not more advanced than you were before.

There existed other manuscripts of the Old Testament. There was one, at least, in every synagogue, that is, in every city of Judea. But what do I say? The Jews had been scattered throughout the world for the space of two hundred years. Every where they had synagogues, and every where they read the Scriptures on the sabbath day. Not only must the apostles have gained the Jewish priests at Jerusalem, but also the scribes and elders of every city in Judea, with those of Antioch, of Rome, of Athens, of Corinth, of Philippi, of Babylon, of Thessalonica, those of the whole world.

Finally, this universal alteration of the sacred books of the Jews, brought about through the co-operation of all the Jewish priests, scribes, and elders in the world, was made with such profound secrecy, that no one has discovered it to the present day; that no remembrance of the authentic text has been preserved in any manuscript; and the deluded Jews, from century to century, confidently present us with the same text which the Christians have altered, while the Jews still retained them in their own hands; and altered on purpose to condemn the Jews; while it was only

necessary to preserve the text as it was, for the purpose of sustaining their own hopes, and of annihilating those of the Christians.—Are you still of opinion that the prophecy was written after the event?

Mr. de Lassalle.—But, sir,

Lucilla.—Ah, it is of no use, my dear! You must give up the point. Readiness to yield, of which you accuse me, is no longer a question. Ready or not, I see no possibility that you can hold out any longer, at least in this stronghold; which is your third, and last.

The Abbé.—And do you think, sir, that in order to decide against the interpolation which you suppose, it is necessary to have witnessed the fulfilment of the prophecy? and that Rousseau is not prejudiced, unjust, insensate, if, without having seen, he does not yield to proofs such as those which I have just given you? The fact is, that this hypothesis contains in itself alone, such an accumulation of absurdities, that your third explanation is more incredible than the second; and the second is more so than the first. If there be not a fourth, I am resolved, for my part, to believe in the intervention of God with regard to prophecy, that I may not be guilty of an excess of credulity. Observe, sir, the order of our argumentation. There are only three natural explanations, as we have learned from Rousseau himself, of the agreement of the event with the prophecy. Either

this agreement is purely accidental:—but prophecy is so full and precise, that this is no more possible than it would be to produce an *Æneid* by throwing printed characters at hazard. It is a philosophical absurdity. Or, the event has been made for the prophecy:—but this is no more possible than that the history of Napoleon was arranged or made at pleasure. It is an historical absurdity. Or, lastly, the prophecy has been made for the event:—but this supposition overturns all the laws of criticism. It is a literary absurdity. Turn which way you will, you can find no other issue. Impossibility, absurdity, will greet you at every step, and your understanding will remain unsatisfied, until at length you yield—which you may without shame in a contest of this nature—and say, with the Egyptian doctors, who had long withstood Moses, “This is the finger of God!” *Exod. viii. 19.*

Mr. de Lassalle.—I cannot go so far as that; but I must confess there is more to be said in favour of prophecy than I before imagined. It is a subject for examination. On reflection I may find something to say in reply, which does not at present suggest itself to my mind. A thought strikes me in support of my first explanation. It is hardly fair to return to a position which I had almost abandoned; but I clearly see it is the only one of the three that is at all tenable.

The Abbé.—You are right, sir; it is the only

tenable one amongst them. At least, I can conceive that you still consider it such, on account of what you call the obscurity of prophecy. When you have studied the Old Testament, it will appear to you as untenable as the other two. But let us hear your reflection.

Mr. de Lassalle.—The Jews, of whom you have just spoken, do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, nor, consequently, that he has fulfilled the prophecies. Nevertheless, they do not believe that their books have been falsified. Neither, that I am aware, do they deny the principal facts in the life of Jesus Christ. They must account for this by supposing the accidental coincidence, which I myself urged at the beginning of our conversation. Is it credible, that a whole nation should admit an absurdity, and admit it at the very time when it might be best investigated?

The Abbé.—"A whole nation!" That is going rather too far. Many Jews believed in Jesus Christ. When St. Paul took his last journey to Jerusalem, the converted Jews were reckoned by many thousands, Acts xxi. 20. If, admitting the fulfilment of prophecy, you find it difficult to explain the obstinacy of the greater number, the conversion of these many thousands is, at least, as inexplicable without this fulfilment. But the incredulity of the many, viewed in its proper light, is a fresh proof of the truth of prophecy: first, because it was predicted; so that it is another

prophecy fulfilled: secondly, because it is the unbelief of the Jews which so wonderfully guarantees the authenticity and integrity of the prophetic writings, as I have just shown. These two proofs united, the faith of some, the incredulity of others, have admirable force. You would do well to read what Pascal says on this point.*

You cannot imagine that the Jews would have admitted the accidental fulfilment of prophecy, had it been as inadmissible as I say. But you forget, sir, the power of prejudice and obstinacy, especially among this unhappy people. They themselves give us the measure of their blindness by their opinion of the Messiah. For the Jews, believing in the prophecies, and not finding them fulfilled in Christ, expect another Messiah, in whom they will be accomplished. But, independent of the fact, that it would be too incredible that another man should be found who would unite in his person all the signs of a prophecy at once so full and so explicit, there are indications which it would be absolutely impossible to reproduce; and, therefore, the Messiah whom the Jews expect cannot come. His time has gone by. Should he be born to-morrow, in ten years, a century hence, could they be sure that he was of the family of David, now that the genealogical tables of the Jews no longer exist? Could he appear four hundred and ninety years

* Thoughts, Second Part, viii. 11.

after an edict had gone forth, allowing the Jews to return to their native land, now that the last edict of this nature was published more than two thousand years ago? Could he show himself in the second temple, now that this second temple is destroyed? Could he put an end to sacrifices, now that eighteen hundred years have elapsed since their discontinuance? Question a Jew on the subject. Press him to tell you precisely what he thinks of the expected Messiah. I can tell you beforehand; for I have already made the trial. His answers will be so confused, as to convince you that the opinions of this wretched people are no authority in this matter; and that the men who were furious enough to commit the greatest of crimes, are prejudiced enough to justify it by an absurd and contradictory supposition. Believe me, they have not fairly examined the question. They made up their minds that Jesus, who opposed them, who openly condemned their vices, who overthrew their carnal hopes, could not be the Messiah; and, therefore, they adopted the first hypothesis that presented itself to their minds: just as the greater part of our modern sceptics begin by laying down, as a principle, that the Christian religion cannot be Divine; and then admit fanaticism, fraud, interpolation, whatever you will, without caring whether their suppositions can be defended, or whether they are airy theories, which, when once clearly defined,

are for ever refuted. I do not refer to you, sir. Our conversation proves that you are no sharer in their injustice.

But if the Jews will not recognise Jesus Christ in the prophecies of the Old Testament, can they refuse to recognise themselves? Listen, sir, to what has been predicted of the Jews, since the time of Moses, in this book which they honour as the book of God; and which they, having had the care of it, are well aware has undergone no alteration.

“It shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.—And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever.

“The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, nor show favour to the young: and he shall eat the fruit of thy cattle, and the fruit of thy land, until thou be destroyed: which also shall not leave thee either corn, wine, or oil, or the increase of thy kine, or flocks of thy sheep, until he have destroyed thee. And he shall besiege thee in all thy gates, until thy high and fenced walls come down, wherein

thou trustedst, throughout all thy land : and he shall besiege thee in all thy gates throughout all thy land, which the Lord thy God hath given thee.

“And thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters, which the Lord thy God hath given thee, in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemies shall distress thee : so that the man that is tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil toward his brother, and toward the wife of his bosom, and toward the remnant of his children which he shall leave : so that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat : because he hath nothing left him in the siege, and in the straitness, wherewith thine enemy shall distress thee in all thy gates.

“The Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance.

“And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude ; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the Lord thy God. And it shall come to pass, that as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you ; so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought ; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither

thou goest to possess it. And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from one end of the earth even unto the other.

“And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest : but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind : and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee ; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life : in the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even ! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it were morning ! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see.

“And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again : and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you.

“And I will bring the land into desolation : and your enemies which shall dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you : and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.—And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies ; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them ; and they shall flee as fleeing from a sword ; and they shall fall when none pursueth.—And they that are left of you

shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands.

“ And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them.—For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth.

“ So that the generation to come of your children that shall rise up after you, and the stranger that shall come from a far land, shall say, when they see the plagues of that land, and the sicknesses which the Lord hath laid upon it :—even all nations shall say, Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land ? what meaneth the heat of this great anger ? Then men shall say, Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them forth out of the land of Egypt :—and the anger of the Lord was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book : and the Lord rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.” *

What say you, sir, to this prediction ? You

* Deut. xxviii. ; Levit. xxvi. 32—39 ; Jer. xxiv. 9 ; Amos ix. 9 ; Deut. xxix. 22—28.

will not accuse it of obscurity. The language is almost as clear as that of history. And has it not been verified? Is it not still verified before our eyes? trait for trait? I see you are struck by this. You will be more so, if you consider each article separately. Could the Romans be better described than they are here? "A nation coming from afar, like the eagle;" speaking a "language" unknown to the Jews; whilst every other nation that had made war upon them came from climes less distant, and spoke languages very analogous to the Hebrew? The siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, is it not drawn to the very life? These high and fenced walls, on which they trusted throughout the land, this dreadful famine, these families disputing for a morsel of food, these children devoured by their own mothers; could we not imagine that, instead of a prophecy, we were reading the recital of the siege by the historian Josephus? The calamities which have fallen upon the Jews, have they not been "wonderful," and of "long continuance?" Do they not still continue; and have they not lasted nearly eighteen centuries? Have not the vanquished Jews, contrary to the general policy of their conquerors, been torn from their native soil, and forbidden to return to it on pain of death? And more: they might, at least, have been transported to one common retreat, where they might have formed a colony; but instead of that, have

they not been dispersed on every side ; and even in the remotest corners of the world, are we not sure to find a remnant of this scattered people ? And yet, wonderful to relate ! have they not invariably remained distinct from every other nation ? And how striking is the image of the prophet Amos, who compares them to corn sifted in a sieve, while not a single grain falls to the earth ! And can we fail to recognise in these traits the condition of the Jews among foreign nations : ease ever flying from them ; their hearts trembling ; their lives in jeopardy ? Have you not read in Josephus, that the Jewish prisoners were led by thousands into Egypt, at two different times, under Titus, and under Adrian ; and that these unhappy slaves were estimated at so low a price, that eleven thousand were allowed to perish from hunger ? Have not the Jews literally been “ an astonishment, a proverb, and a by-word,” among men ? and that, not in Christian countries only, but among Mohammedans, and even among pagans ?* And have not their calamities been the wonder of the whole world ? Has not their condition been considered, in all ages, as something out of the ordinary course of

* Might we expect to see the Jews trodden under foot by Pagans, who never heard of the Saviour ? Who taught the Hindoo to punish the Jew, even to the present day, without knowing the crime of which he has been guilty ?—Buchanan's *Christian Researches in Asia*, pp. 297, 298.

nature, and as the effect of a direct curse from God?

Try to explain this prophecy by Rousseau's three hypotheses. *Accidental coincidence?* How can we admit this, when the prophecy is so explicit, and when it refers to circumstances so special, to a history unique in the annals of the world? *Interpolation?* But when could it have been made, to meet the exigency of events which have lasted eighteen centuries, and which still continue? *The invention or the arrangement of history?* How can this be possible in reference to facts which take place at this present time, and under our own eyes? Here you have what Rousseau demands. You are witness of the event. If you are not witness of the prophecy, at any rate you are witness that there has been no interpolation; and this suffices. In short, you may affirm that accidental coincidence is impossible, unless you admit that it is possible in every case; which is contrary to common sense, and to Rousseau himself. Thus, sir, if one must be credulous, not to believe the prophecies concerning the Messiah; one must be still more so, not to believe those respecting the Jews. It would require a degree of credulity, of which neither you nor I are capable. I promised to show you that those who reject prophecy fall into absurdity. I think I have redeemed my promise.

Lucilla.—Can any thing be clearer? Really,

unless we have determined not to be convinced, we cannot but yield to such arguments. Is it not so, my dear?

Mr. de Lassalle.—I frankly confess, I never imagined that proofs, not only of such force, but also of such a nature, could be alleged in favour of revelation. This prophecy concerning the Jews, especially, is most wonderful. I never observed it before. But I repeat, I will think of all this again. You have invited me to examine. I am quite willing to do so. More I cannot say at present.

The Abbé.—It is all I ask. I will only make one more observation. Prophecy is but one of the many proofs in favour of revelation. Had we chosen another, instead of this, I could equally have shown you, that it requires more credulity to reject than to receive revelation. I could have demonstrated this with respect to miracles, the propagation of Christianity, and the character of Jesus Christ; not to mention the morality or the doctrines of the gospel.

Miracles.—It is easy to say that they were falsely contrived. But were this the case, how was it that so many of Christ's disciples went throughout the world attesting facts which they knew to be false, (for men cannot be mistaken with respect to facts, as they may be with respect to doctrines,) when they had no other reward to expect for their imposture, than reproach,

imprisonment, and death? * How was it that thousands believed their testimony, even in the very cities where these imaginary events, on which their preaching rested, were said to have taken place; while the interests, the passions, the habits of these proselytes conspired to make them cleave to their ancient belief? How was it that the enemies of the gospel acknowledged the miracles of Jesus Christ, and formed various conjectures to account for them, when it would have been so easy to silence the apostles by a single question, "Is this true?" For the Jews attributed the miracles of Jesus Christ to Satan; the pagans attributed them to magic; but neither denied them. We, who live in a more enlightened age, cannot admit either supposition. Yet the fact remains, and the gospel is justified.

The propagation of the gospel.—How can we explain the fact, that the gospel has overspread the earth, if God be not for it? It is in vain that the success of Mohammed is urged in reply. Every thing is different, every thing is directly opposite, in the two cases. Mohammed, with powerful resources, triumphed over a feeble resistance. Jesus Christ, with the least possible resources, triumphed over the most formidable resistance. The doctrine of Mohammed favoured the tastes and passions of mankind: that of Jesus

* Pascal's Thoughts, part second, xvii. 56.

Christ withstood them to the face. Mohammed employed force of arms, and was a murderer for his religion. Jesus Christ employed nothing but persuasion, and was the martyr of his. The success of Mohammed is in the natural course of things: that of Jesus Christ is contrary to all human expectations.*

The character of Christ.—How can we explain, in a simple individual—what do I say? in a fanatic, or an impostor—a moral perfection, of which another example is not to be found in the whole human race? Or, if you think that the character of Christ is drawn from imagination, how can you explain the fact, that a few fishermen should have conceived the idea of a character of such perfection, as no author, even in the most enlightened countries, has ever equalled, either before or since?

And the morality of the gospel, the incomparable superiority of which even your philosophers are constrained to admit; and its doctrine

*“ Mohammed established himself by slaying; Jesus Christ by subjecting his followers to be slain; Mohammed by forbidding to read; Jesus Christ by commanding to read. In short, they are so contrary to each other, that if Mohammed has taken every human means to ensure success, Jesus Christ has taken every human means to perish. And instead of concluding that since Mohammed has succeeded, Jesus Christ might succeed, we ought to say, that since Mohammed has succeeded, Christianity must have perished, had it not been sustained by a power altogether Divine.”—Pascal's Thoughts, art. xii.

concerning God, and a future state, so just, so simple, and the whole so new ! There is not one of these points on which I could not embarrass you, as much as I did on the question of the prophecies. Be assured, my dear sir, that incredulity cannot stand a close investigation. Rousseau himself, notwithstanding his apparent depth, has merely glanced at these important questions in his "Vicaire Savoyard." Examine it : you will every where find false assertions, false principles ; and whatever of truth is blended with it, serves only to condemn him by his own testimony. I appeal to his celebrated passage on the Scriptures, and on the character of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, Rousseau finds in Jesus Christ superhuman virtue, and in the gospel a perfect moral code : on the other hand, he finds in the same gospel doctrines which seem to him strange and incredible. In presence of this two-fold view, how ought he to reason ? Ought he to say, " Since this book sheds divine light on moral questions, which are the least subject to dispute, I am bound to receive it as coming from God ; and believe its testimony on points which are beyond the sphere of my observation, such as the thoughts and designs of the Creator ? " Or, ought he to say, " Since there are in this book, on subjects with which I am little acquainted, certain statements which astonish me, I am bound to reject it, though it is radiant with truth on the clearest

points?" He adopts the latter alternative; for his pretended suspension of judgment exists only in words. Sir, I maintain that Rousseau has shown himself credulous in thus deciding: and he is the more inexcusable in his error, inasmuch as he felt the force of the evidence. "The life and death of Christ are those of a God; and we cannot tell whether or not he be an impostor! The morality of the gospel is perfect; and one cannot tell whether or not it is the fruit of falsehood! The apostles have invented nothing; and we cannot tell whether they have spoken truth, or whether they have lied!" What are the pretended contradictions of the gospel after this? Ah! sir, you will find no repose, even for your reason itself, but in faith; provided your reason is *reasonable* and not *reasoning*.

Mr. de Lassalle.—You are very severe upon Rousseau; but allow me to ask another question. After all, what need have we of a revelation, when, without its aid, we can have such a religion as that of the "Vicaire Savoyard?"

The Abbé.—"Without its aid!" Do you then think, sir, that Rousseau owes nothing to revelation, in his ideas of God, of conscience, and the immortality of the soul? Christianity has been in the world eighteen centuries. It has proclaimed, with perfect clearness and assurance, the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul. It is not, then, surprising that a philosopher should

arise and support these truths in his turn. He establishes them by the aid of reason alone, say they. But who knows whether revelation has not been to reason what the clear-sighted is to the blind, whom he instructs in reading and writing, till the blind man is able to do both alone? I see but one means of ascertaining whether this be the case or not. It is to see what reason did before revelation was generally given to the world. It is a question of history. What degree of light did natural religion display, before there was a revealed religion? And yet this is a point which we cannot completely solve. For if the Bible is true, revelation is as ancient as the world itself; and the patriarchal revelation, which takes its date from the first man, may have penetrated among pagan nations, where the Mosaic revelation was unknown. But, in short, what religion had mankind before the coming of Christ? Inquire, not among the more remote nations, but among the most civilized; among the Greeks. What was their belief concerning God, and a future state?

It is not necessary that I should remind you what was the light, or rather the darkness, of this people. Rousseau speaks of it in his "Profession of Faith;" and on this subject he exhibits admirable truth and eloquence. It is true, the Greek philosophers were exempt from the superstitions of the vulgar; but what did they substitute for

them? They did not believe in a hundred different gods, nor in the infernal regions of Pluto; but they had no clear conceptions, either of the unity of God, or of a future state. There was not one among them who taught these two truths clearly, simply, and positively. We know that Socrates, when near death, expressed himself on the immortality of the soul as one who fears to say too much. And do you think that Plato or Aristotle ever spoke of God as Rousseau speaks?

But admitting that reason, without the help of revelation, could have discovered the doctrine of the "Vicaire Savoyard," would this doctrine content you, sir? Have you so little reflected on God, the world, and yourself? For we cannot deny that we are sinners, nor that sin is an infringement of moral order. To repair this disorder is the grand problem of the Christian religion. But does the "Vicaire Savoyard" solve—does he even understand the full bearing, of this problem? By no means. If the Bible is a true revelation, the "Vicaire Savoyard" is profoundly ignorant both of God and man. His religion sufficient! And it is in France, where philosophy has been put to the test, and has been found so fearfully wanting, that this assertion is made! Was it sufficient for Rousseau himself? Did it give him peace of mind? Did it render him humble, charitable, and pure? Let his life, let his death, reply! For it is in the

life, it is in the person of Rousseau, that we must learn how to appreciate the "Vicaire Savoyard," and not in the pages of a book. Were you called upon to judge of doctrines by their advocates, say which should you find the most clearly proved: The truth of the Christian religion by Pascal, living in a holy and irreproachable manner, suffering patiently, and dying in peace; or the self-sufficiency of natural religion, by Rousseau, who ———? But the detail is superfluous; and I will not offend the ears of Madame de Lassalle. One would think that a just God, to confound this unhappy sophist, had allowed him to exemplify the fallacy of his own maxims by his conduct. He could not but perceive that he himself was his own refutation; so that, whatever effect his eloquence might produce, should be counteracted by the remembrance of his life.

Mr. de Lassalle.—I do not seek to justify Rousseau; but you must not consider the doctrine responsible for its advocate. This would be a dangerous argument against the Christian religion.

The Abbé.—It is not a conclusive argument against the doctrine of Rousseau; but still it makes me pause and reflect. Doubtless, there are infidels who are both honourable and virtuous men in the eyes of the world. There have been such among the heathen. But even for these, natural religion neither can nor will suffice. The

doctrine of Christ is alone able to sanctify, console, and save.

Mr. de Lassalle.—It is this doctrine which I find so repulsive. It is so little in harmony with the ideas we form of God, so incredible in every respect.

The Abbé.—This ought not to restrain you. When we are once convinced, by solid proofs, that the Bible has God for its author, we ought to believe it, even when its doctrines appear most strange. May not our ideas be erroneous? And how do you know; perhaps this doctrine only surprises you because it is true? This is what Jesus Christ said to the Jews: "Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not," John viii. 4, 5. But there are aspects in which this same doctrine appears perfectly clear; and it would furnish us, at need, with a fresh proof in favour of Christianity. This is what is called *internal evidence*. I did not mention it before, because, strong as it is, it can only be appreciated by one who is open to conviction, and who begins attentively to study revelation. But if the arguments which I have adduced can stimulate you to undertake this study, a new order of considerations will claim your attention; and the contents of the Bible will complete the justification of its theology.

You will be struck, in the first place, at finding in the Bible, written by authors, many in number, and separated from each other by intervening

centuries, a marvellous connexion and unity. You will see the plan of revelation gradually unfolding itself with revolving ages, and exhibiting the most evident marks of oneness of design, and of its emanation from one common author. Who can this author be, but God alone? What other mind could comprehend fifteen centuries at a glance? You will then think it as incredible that the Bible should be the work of man, as that a perfect picture should be formed by fifty painters, who should pass in succession before the canvass, and each give a stroke with his pencil in passing.

You will afterwards be delighted to see what light the Bible sheds on subjects the most useful and the most profound. You will find, respecting God, his law, and his government, notions as new as they are instinct with truth. You will learn to know yourself so well, that you will be constrained to confess, that He who made the Bible made also the heart of man. You will find the solution of these grand problems, which have ever reduced philosophy to despair—the origin of evil; the disorders of society; the contradictions which are observable in man. You will rest convinced that the Bible cannot be explained without God, as you will acknowledge that the world cannot be explained without the Bible.

You will be strengthened in this conviction by comparing the instructions of this book with the contemporary lessons of human wisdom. Look

at the Jews, among whom reason had done comparatively nothing. Look at the Greeks, among whom it had worked prodigies. How is it, that while the first possessed the most sublime views of religion, the other had only vague conjectures among their philosophers, and superstitions among the multitude? Whilst a few Galilean fishermen trace the only picture of perfect holiness that the world ever saw; whilst they announce *one* God, just, wise, and merciful; whilst they reveal a blissful eternity, and show the way by which it may be attained; all is confused, abandoned, and disordered in Rome and Greece. Let us go back to the Old Testament. We must retrograde six hundred years, to reach the last of the Jewish prophecies. For the Old Testament is the most ancient of books, and Jewish history is several centuries in advance of that of Greece and Rome. The very time when the prophets Malachi, Haggai, Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Hosea,* were preaching this glorious doctrine to the Jews, "Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no Saviour. I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." "Cease to do evil; learn to do well." "Rend your heart,

* From five to eight hundred years before Christ.

and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God : for he is gracious and merciful," Isa. xliii. 10, 11, 25 ; vi. 3 ; i. 16, 17 ; Joel ii. 13 : this very time corresponds with that of the seven sages, when philosophy timidly essayed its first steps ; when Thales drew the world from water, and Pythagoras taught the metempsychosis ; Anaxagoras had hardly appeared, and Socrates was not yet born. At this time David celebrated the creation, providence, and grace, in strains which, from age to age, give pure and exquisite delight to every pious mind, when, confessing his sin, as an act of rebellion against God ; but, at the same time confiding in the loving kindness of Him whom he had offended, he wrote these words, which have no counterpart in the whole of profane antiquity : " I acknowledge my transgressions : and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.—Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean : wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow," Psalm li. 3, 4, 7. This period preceded that in which Homer and Hesiod, by their beautiful, but vain fables, excited the admiration of their countrymen. Moses, who published the Decalogue, that everlasting code of the purest morality, the foundation of all laws and of all society, was contemporary with Orpheus : and the Greeks wept over the adventures of Eurydice, while the Jews listened with terror to the procla-

mation of the law from Mount Sinai. Abraham, who understood the value of faith, and the necessity of implicit obedience to the commands of God—Joseph, who when pressed to commit an action which was regarded as a trivial fault among the heathen, cried, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”—correspond to Inachus, Cadmus, Cecrops—to the most profound moral darkness. So strong a light, on the one hand, such total obscurity on the other; and the light among a people deemed barbarous, and the darkness among the most civilized; who can explain this, if the Bible be not the book of God? How wonderful a people are the Jews! Before the coming of Christ, and when they alone read the prophetic writings, they were, in their knowledge of God, unequalled among the nations of the earth; and hardly had the gospel extended to the Greeks and Romans, than these same Jews fell as much below as they had formerly surpassed them! And yet, men cannot perceive that they owed their former superiority to their possession of the Old Testament, and their subsequent inferiority to their rejection of the New!

You will find all this in religion, sir; but you will find greater things than these. You will find doctrines perfectly adapted to your moral necessities. You will find in Jesus Christ the God of man; the God of sinners; your God. Miracles, prophecies, will then appear merely secondary

proofs, to which will succeed moral evidence, more precious and persuasive still. Your difficulties will be lost in a flood of light; and you will confess, that if the external evidence in favour of the Bible is such that you cannot but believe it, however strange its contents may appear, the internal evidence, in its turn, is so conclusive, that you would recognise the Bible as the work of God, were you to find it in a desert, unsupported by any testimony. I express myself with warmth, sir. It is because I speak from personal experience. I confess there was a time when I doubted: but I examined, and I believed. O sir, will not this blessed experience be yours also?

Mr. de Lassalle.—You press me very closely, my dear sir; but not so quick. At all events, I cannot understand how it is that every body is not convinced of the truth of religion, if the evidence in its favour is so strong. Nevertheless, I am quite sincere; and sure I am that if I have not believed, it is no fault of mine.

The Abbé.—If men are not more generally convinced of the truth of religion, it is because they give no heed to it; or because they reject it. You are sincere, say you? Sincere in the sense of Rousseau, you certainly are, and more so than he was. But sincerity is not all that is requisite. In vain might the husbandman sow tares in his field, sincerely believing that he was sowing wheat: he would nevertheless reap nothing but

tares. So the doctrines of infidelity, with whatever sincerity they may be received, can neither enlighten nor save mankind. It is truth that he requires. But I will say more. Wherever sincerity really exists, Christianity is not far off. Can that sincerity be true, which does not lead us to examine? Seek truth. Seek it by every possible means. Then you will be sincere: but then, without being a prophet, I foresee you will soon be a believer. And should it be true, sir, that the Christian religion is of God! Should it be true, that you must believe the gospel in order to be saved! Should it be true, that in neglecting it, you are consigning your soul to eternal perdition!

Lucilla, (after a pause.)—My husband has left us. He is agitated. I am myself too much affected to speak now. You have done me good. Be assured of my warmest gratitude. I shall soon write to you. Adieu!

PART II.

INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE.

LETTER I.

LUCILLA TO THE ABBE FAVIEN.

BLESSED be the day when I first indulged the heaven-inspired thought of writing to you! You have dissipated all my doubts. Nothing, I imagine, can give greater pleasure to a minister of Christ, than to bring back a lost sheep to the fold. I, sir, am this lost sheep; and you have led me back. At least, you have begun this good work; and I confidently hope you will complete it.

Yesterday I received the parcel you have had the goodness to send me, with the note that accompanied it. I gratefully accept the copy of Pascal's "Thoughts," which you kindly enclosed, and have already read several of the passages you pointed out. They are of exquisite strength and beauty. But how shall I describe the pleasure your manuscript gave me? It was indeed kind and considerate of you thus to write down the two conversations we have had together; and you

have done this so naturally, that when I read it, I almost fancy we are still talking together.

I have examined, with renewed interest, your whole line of argument; and if, while hearing you enlarge upon it, I might have feared the seduction of your eloquence, I am now convinced, by this deliberate survey, that your eloquence is that of reason; and that the solidity of your proofs justifies the fervour of your faith. Both mind and heart are equally in favour of the gospel; and I no longer doubt that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, nor that the Holy Bible is an inspired book.

I cannot tell you, sir, what comfort I derive from this conviction. New light dawns upon my mind. I have a foretaste of a new existence. Something serious and profound is about to occupy the place which has hitherto been absorbed by trivial interests. I once heard a pious person say, "There is in the heart of man a void, which only God can fill." It seems to me as if I were now about to experience the truth of this. Not that the future appears strewed with roses; I anticipate conflicts, I expect sacrifices. Nevertheless, I am not disheartened by this prospect. I also begin to feel ill at ease with myself. I insensibly discover in my heart and life things which are not as they ought to be, and which must be displeasing to God. But if God thus makes me feel my need of him, surely it is not in order to

cast me off! Amidst all the thoughts which agitate me, I find inexpressible consolation in saying to myself, "God has spoken; what more do I require? God has spoken; I have only to listen to his voice, and follow him."

You it is who have taught me to discover this voice. O, provide me with the means of hearing it! My heart already expands to receive its divine instructions! The fragments of the Bible contained in my "Manual" will not suffice me. I must see the *whole* of the inspired writings before I can fully appreciate the wonderful harmony you have so well described. Pray procure me a Bible, my dear sir. I long to have one, to read it, to devote myself to the study of its holy pages. I might have bought a copy of the sacred writings from one of those wandering colporteurs,* who have hawked them about the country during the last year or two. But though they offer us Catholic versions, our Curé has exhorted us from the pulpit not to buy them. He affirms that they are not the pure word of God; that important alterations have been made in them; and that whole books have been excluded. It is true, he is not a man in whom one can place unlimited confidence: yet he may be right; and I tremble

* Hawkers. Various Protestant Societies in France employ colporteurs, who travel through the country, and offer copies of the Holy Scriptures, at cheap prices, from door to door. Great good has been done by the labours of these men.—Tr.

at the thought of trusting myself alone to the guidance of a book, which some impious hand may have altered, even in the least degree. I would rather defer my possession of a copy of the Scriptures till I can receive one from your hands.

Before I conclude, I must add a few words respecting my husband. You have certainly made a great impression upon his mind. Since your visit I have not once heard him ridicule religion. He has read your manuscript attentively ; and it still is his intention carefully to investigate the truth of Christianity. But I see, with some uneasiness, that he puts off this inquiry from day to day.

LETTER II.

THE ABBE FAVIEN TO LUCILLA.

You are not mistaken in thinking, that the pious feelings which your letter displays would prove a source of true consolation to my mind. If it be true, that I have had any share in producing so happy a change, I most heartily thank God for it. To Him let us ascribe all the glory, overlooking the feeble instrument of which, in his mercy, he has deigned to make use. Doubt not, my dear madam, that He who has brought you into the good and right way, will lead you safely

to the end; and you may confidently say with the psalmist, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands," Psalm cxxxviii. 8. As for me, I am quite willing to lend you every assistance in my power. It is true, I should have preferred your receiving the counsels of your natural directors; yet I dare not urge you on so delicate a point. I can conceive all that is exceptionable in your position; and if you think that I can be of any service to you, you will find, at least, that my zeal will not fail you.

You have done well in not buying a Bible. Those which are sold by the agents of the societies called Biblical and Evangelical are incomplete, as your Curé stated. Several books are wanting, which the church includes in the canon of the Old Testament; such as Judith, Susanna, Maccabees, and others. As to the reproach of falsification, truth obliges me to say, that it is utterly without foundation. I am not acquainted with the Protestant versions, sold by these colporteurs; but I have myself bought a Catholic Bible from one of them. It is according to the version of Sacy, which is the best we possess in French. I have compared it with an old edition, supported by the approbation of several bishops; and I have found no other difference between them than the slight changes which time almost

invariably introduces into works which are frequently reprinted. I am indeed grieved that Mr. Alexis, who is a worthy man, in spite of his little failings, should have allowed himself to make so grave an imputation, not having duly examined the subject. Unfortunately, he is not the only one who has done this ; and I much fear the Catholic church will be more injured by the use of such means, than by the attack of its adversaries.

My opinion of the books which are sold by these agents is exactly that of one of our most respectable prelates, who died Archbishop of Besançon. When he occupied the see of Montauban, a colporteur, who had met with opposition from several ecclesiastics in his diocese, took the wise precaution of submitting his books to the bishop's inspection. This is the answer which he received from his Grace. In order to understand it, I must remind you, that the books which the Protestants omit belong to the Old Testament only ; and that their New Testament is the same as ours.

“Montauban, April 14, 1832.

“ I thank you, Mr. Bénèche, for the gift of the Bible and the New Testament, edition 1831. It did not require a long examination to assure me, that the latter is in every respect conformable to the edition of 1759, by Mr. Le Maistre de Sacy, under the approbation of the French clergy.

Consequently, no obstacle exists to its circulation among Catholics.

“The case is not the same with respect to the Old Testament, in which are omitted, in the edition of 1831, all or a part of the books which are not found in the Hebrew text, but which the church has nevertheless recognised as canonical ; such as Tobit, Judith, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom, Maccabees, and the history of Susanna.

“To approve or to authorize the circulation of the Old Testament among Catholics would be to recognise in others, beside the Church of Rome, the right of judging with respect to the inspiration of the sacred writings, and to subject myself to the awful threatenings of the Holy Spirit: ‘If any man shall take away from the words of this book, God shall take away his part out of the book of life,’ Rev. xxii. 19. So I advise Mr. Bénèche to refrain from selling the latter work.

“L. GUILLAUME, Bishop of Montauban.”

According to this, I should not have objected to your procuring a copy of the New Testament, sold by the colporteurs, had I thought the time arrived when the Holy Scriptures might be placed in your hands. But I think you would do well to wait a little longer ; and I would rather not send them to you myself, in spite of your earnest and touching solicitations.

Perhaps, you are surprised at this. If, however, you will call to mind my first letter, you will see

that my views have not changed. Now is the decisive time with you. You have ascertained, beyond a doubt, that the Bible is of God. You have been convinced of this by evidence, and not by believing the simple attestation of the church. So far this is well, provided that, being once enlightened on the subject, you ever after submit to the guidance of the church, which alone has received authority from God to interpret the Scriptures. But if, unaided, you presume to fathom their depths, I fear that you will be misled by your private feelings, and that you will mistake your own opinions for the thoughts of God. I fear this doubly for you, my dear madam, because of the impression and habits of your childhood ; and also, if the whole truth must be told, because of the impatience which you manifest to read the Scriptures—to read the whole of them yourself. I cannot help considering this as a sort of exaltation, which will expose you, without defence, to the danger I have just pointed out. My frankness will not displease you, I am sure. From a priest you expect not vain compliments. Beware of self-will, I conjure you. Beware of idle curiosity. Beware even of excessive zeal. You would not be the first whom it has led astray. How sad, if when on the point of reaching the desired haven, you should be cast farther from it than ever!

Begin, then, my dear madam, by consulting the

church, and by receiving the doctrines which it has found in the Bible. They are contained in writings which every one may comprehend. You will find them concisely, but clearly stated in the "Catechism of the Council of Trent," which I have the honour of sending you with this letter. I also enclose "Stories from the Bible," by Roy-aumont.* You will not disdain this little work because it is written for children; it is the more simple on that account: and as it exactly follows the order of the Bible it will, in some measure, supply the place of that sacred book, without presenting the same disadvantages. Moreover, these disadvantages will not always exist; and it is not my intention eventually to forbid the reading of the Bible. All that I desire is, that, like as the "new-born babes," of whom one of the apostles speaks, you will be satisfied for a time with the "milk" which the church—that good and tender mother—offers you, with so much love. In the course of time, when you are able to bear "strong meat," when, "by reason of use, your senses are exercised to discern good and evil," you will be supplied with a Bible. The church itself will give you one, provided you follow its directions, as to the order and choice of the passages you may read, and adopt, as is most due, its meaning in preference to your own.

* *Histoires de la Bible, de Roy-aumont.*

LETTER III.

LUCILLA TO THE ABBE.

As you foresaw, your answer has surprised me to the last degree. I never for a moment doubted that you would eagerly grant my request. Far from entertaining the slightest scruple on the subject, I imagined that I was fulfilling a duty. What, sir, you persuade me that the Bible is the word of God, and then refuse me the satisfaction of reading it!

I understand you perfectly, and God forbid that I should mistake your pious intention! You wish my faith to be derived from the Bible, but I must not draw it from the fountain-head. Others, better able than myself, will draw it for me. And yet, the little I have hitherto read has done me so much good! Was it not the Bible, by the extracts I met with in my "Manual," that first inspired me with the desire of saving my soul? and was it not this desire that prompted me to address you? If I have had the privilege of hearing your instructions—if I am at length roused from my long indifference—if I now seek the truth, from which, doubtless, I am further removed than I imagined—do I not owe all this to the Bible? I feel a sort of gratitude towards this sacred volume. I expected it as one expects the

visit of a faithful friend, from whom we hope to receive salutary counsels : as I expected you, my dear sir, on the day when God, in his mercy, sent you to remove all my doubts.

You fear the influence of the impressions which I received during childhood. It is true, that I have more than once seen the Bible in the hands of my father ; and this may indeed increase my desire to possess it. Do not, however, suppose that I am prejudiced in favour of the religious opinions of my family. I think I have already told you that my prejudices, if such I have, are all enlisted on the opposite side. But that I may be fully enlightened, what more simple means can I employ, than the study of the book which both Catholics and Protestants recognise as the word of God ?

You tell me that I must mistrust myself. I feel that this is very true ; and I know not what to say in reply. Does Christian humility require that I should abstain from reading the Bible ? Well, then, I will give it up. Believe me, if this is not a question of early impressions, it is still less a question of self-love. Graver motives determine me ; an irresistible feeling urges me on in spite of myself. I want to save my soul. At any price I seek my soul's salvation. But may I not preserve my humility, and still read the Bible ? If I never open it without first saying to God, " Lord, suffer me not to misunderstand thy

word ; and refuse not the light of thy grace to thy handmaid, whose chief desire is to know thee, and to obey thy voice"—O, sir, surely God, who is goodness itself, would preserve me from error !

Is the Bible, then, so obscure, that the simple and the unlettered cannot understand it without an interpreter ? Has God spoken only to the learned ? Has he not first provided for the lowly and ignorant, such as myself ? Ah ! if Christ were still upon the earth, should I not flee to listen to him ; should I not desire to see him ; to see him with my own eyes ; and to hear him with my own ears ? I have nearly a similar feeling with respect to the Bible. I know that it is the voice of God. You have taught me to consider it as such. I burn to hear it ; I want to hear it myself ; whoever interposes between it and me, embarrasses and incommodes me.....Excuse me, sir ; perhaps I offend God in the person of his minister ; God knows that this is not my intention ! Forgive my ignorance, all these things are new to me.

Allow me fully to explain myself. You wish that I should allow myself to be directed by the church in the reading of the Bible ; and that I should abstain from it so long as the church sees good. I am ready to do this, quite ready, if it be the will of God. But you will not require me to yield without proofs. Give me your reasons. Do in this instance what you did when I doubted the inspiration of the Bible, and in which you

have so well succeeded. I confidently hope that you will give me this fresh proof of your zeal for my welfare. Speak : I listen. How can I fear to err while I submit to your direction !

P.S. I know not whether I ought to tell you of a remark which was made by Mr. Lassalle. I had given him your letter to read. In returning it he said, rather sharply, "Then why did he urge me so strongly to read the Old Testament ? Does he reckon more on my docility than on yours ?" This reply has deeply grieved me. I hoped so much for him from the reading of the Bible ; and it is true, as you will remember, that you advised him to undertake it.

LETTER IV.

THE ABBE TO LUCILLA.

THESE demonstrations, these perpetual reasonings, are not what I should have chosen for you. You have a secret propensity for them, which I would rather combat than cherish. You wish to see and understand every thing. Believe me, you will find no peace but in entire submission of mind. Have you then forgotten what the Lord said to Thomas : "Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed?" But I feel that I have entered upon a plan with you,

which I know not how to abandon; and being placed in this alternative, either again to satisfy you, or perhaps throw a stumbling-block in your way, I think it my duty to prove to you the authority of the church, as I have before proved the truth of Divine revelation. You will soon be led to acknowledge, that the first is not less clearly established than the second; and that the Bible and the church are so inseparably connected together, that one cannot be a consistent Christian without being a Catholic Christian. But when once convinced of this, stop, I conjure you. Allow yourself to be led, and beware of fighting against the truth.

We are agreed that the Bible is inspired of God. But what we require to know is, not the letter, the text, but the spirit, the meaning. "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life," saith the apostle, 2 Cor. iii. 6. How is the divine sense which is hidden in the Bible to be discovered? This is the question. To this question there are two replies. Some say, "Every one must examine for himself, confiding in his own private judgment." This is the natural way; and I am not surprised that it is the first which has presented itself to your mind. Others say, "God has established a visible and permanent tribunal upon earth, whom he has charged to interpret the Bible in his name, and whose infallibility he guarantees. Listen to it, and submit to its

decisions." This is the way of faith, and the only one, as you will soon perceive, by which you may safely attain the true knowledge of God.

I will, in the first place, make a preliminary remark, which will greatly simplify my task. There are, properly speaking, two points to be proved: First, that an infallible church exists; secondly, that this church is the Catholic. Were we fully to discuss the second point, it would involve us in historical researches unfitted for the limits of a letter. But this labour is not necessary; and I think that a few words will be sufficient to elucidate this particular article. I will reserve my longer arguments for the general proposition. For in this case, when the principle is fully established, the application is implied. Let it be once acknowledged that an infallible church exists, and it will be easy to show that this can be no other than the Catholic. A very simple observation on this point contains all that is necessary for our present object: The Catholic church is the only one that lays claim to infallibility. A church established by God to pronounce infallible judgment in every case of controversy must itself be aware of the fact; and, consequently, all dissenting churches, as they do not believe themselves infallible, cannot possibly be so. This privilege, then, or rather this awful charge, remains uncontested with the Catholic church. Consult experience. Have you ever

met with any one who believed in an infallible church, and who refused to accept the authority of ours? And is it not true, that you yourself, madam, if you were convinced that an infallible church exists, would never think of seeking it elsewhere, than in that church which you see reigning over almost the whole of Christendom?

Let us, then, confine ourselves to the chief point. Let us prove the existence of a visible church, which God hath established for the interpretation of the Scriptures, and which he directs in all its decisions. I shall adduce three proofs in support of this proposition: Arguments, which demonstrate the necessity of this infallible tribunal; Holy Scripture, which teaches us that it has been instituted by God; and tradition, from which we learn that it has always been acknowledged.

FIRST PROOF.

THE NECESSITY OF THIS TRIBUNAL.

Reason alone suffices to show the necessity of an infallible tribunal. The meaning of the Bible must be obscure and profound, in proportion as it is Divine. And yet we would trust to our own private judgment for its discovery! But what is more variable, more subject to error, than private judgment? In this case, religion would be

abandoned to the same uncertainty, in which all philosophical theories are involved. In philosophy, doubt may be tolerated, because it does not affect salvation. And men have not failed to indulge in it. Plato and Aristotle, Leibnitz and Locke, Kant and his disciples, condemn each other, and engage in endless disputes. Some, indeed, have considered universal scepticism as the highest point of wisdom. But the world fares none the worse for their wrangling; and if a philosopher is mistaken, the only evil that results from his error is, that he is neglected after his death, though he may have been in high repute during his life-time. But what would become of us, if the question of our eternal salvation, which constitutes the chief end of our religion, were thus abandoned to the caprice of systems? It is to this, nevertheless, that private opinion inevitably leads. It is in vain you urge, that the Bible is the word of God. In this we are agreed. But we must understand the Bible. If private opinion be charged with its interpretation, it will turn the word of God into as many meanings as there are teachers who undertake its explanation. And why should not every body undertake it?

At this rate, madam, of what service is the Bible? Revelation becomes useless. I will say more: it would, perhaps, have been better for us

never to have possessed it. Then, at least, we should have been spared the scandal of seeing the doctrine of God a prey to all the caprices of opinion; Holy Scripture serving as food to hopeless quarrels; the truth brought into disrepute; and, to use an expression of Jesus Christ, "light itself turned into darkness." Would you ever recognise this as the work of God? No, no. It is impossible to admit the order which our adversaries suppose, because it is unworthy of his wisdom; or rather, this order would be nothing less than organized disorder. Jesus Christ can not have left his work unfinished. He must necessarily have somewhere established a tribunal, to which he has given sovereign authority and positive light to explain his written word. Without this auxiliary, the written word would no more suffice for the church, than a code of laws would meet the wants of society, without a body of judges, to explain and enforce them. Such a code, isolated, mute, unapplied, would only engender endless disputes. Let us then conclude, madam, that a visible tribunal exists; because it is indispensable for the peace of the church; for the unity of the faith; and, if I may so express myself, for the honour of the Scriptures themselves.

This is what reason itself suggests; and you must allow that its arguments are strong. But we have something still more decisive; I mean

fact. If reason cannot conceive that God should have established his church, without forming, at the same time, an infallible tribunal in its bosom, Scripture and history combine to attest that such a tribunal has in reality been formed. Let us first examine Scripture.

SECOND PROOF.

HOLY SCRIPTURE.

There exists on earth a church of Christ, which has the promise of eternal protection. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it," Matt. xvi. 18. This church has Jesus Christ for its celestial Head: but it has also terrestrial heads, whom the Holy Ghost has established over it. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God," Acts xx. 28; "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me," Luke x. 16. We owe them obedience, even when their virtue would not otherwise entitle them to it. "Be subject also to the froward," 1 Pet. ii. 18. And, above all, this church has a head, a successor from St. Peter, to whom special promises are given: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatso-

ever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Simon, I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not. And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. Feed my lambs, feed my sheep," Matt. xvi. 18, 19 ; Luke xxii. 32 ; John xxi. 15, 17. The ministers of this church have power to remit and to retain sins ; a power which we have just seen more especially ascribed to the apostle Peter. " Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven : and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained," Matt. xviii. 18 ; John xx. 23. This church is visible ; it may be consulted ; and its decisions ought to be respected as those of God himself : " If thy brother trespass against thee, tell it unto the church : but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican," Matt. xviii. 15, 17. This church is " the pillar and ground of the truth," 1 Tim. iii. 15. Christ will never abandon it : " Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," Matt. xxviii. 20 : a promise which cannot apply to the apostles alone, but which must extend to their successors ; since the apostles could not live till the consummation of all things. Then, when leaving the earth, in order to reassure them

against the fear of being deprived of his assistance, Christ promises them the Holy Spirit, who shall guide them into all truth: "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. He shall teach you all things. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you," John xiv. 16, 26; xvi. 13; Matt. x. 20. And these same disciples of Christ, shortly afterwards assembled in Jerusalem, did not fear thus to commence a letter which they addressed to the churches: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us," Acts xv. 28; thus showing the authority which God conferred on his bishops assembled in council. From all this, one of the apostles draws, with respect to the interpretation of the prophecies, a conclusion which is evidently as applicable to the other parts of Scripture, and which of itself alone is sufficient to decide the question: "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation," 2 Peter i. 20.

Frankly, madam, now are not these passages enough to convince an unprejudiced mind, that there must be a visible church on earth, to which the gift of infallibility had been promised; and which, being traced back to the apostles, through an uninterrupted succession, will endure to the end of time?

THIRD PROOF.

TRADITION.

I appeal, lastly, to historical fact. A perpetual tradition, which dates from the time of the apostles, attests that men have always acknowledged the existence of an infallible church.

But let us here anticipate an objection. It may be urged, that tradition cannot afford any positive proof, because it is but the testimony of fallible men. The answer is easy. I shall not appeal to your good sense, madam, or, I ought rather to say, to your piety, for an impartial opinion of a doctrine, according to which, nothing is proved by the unanimous consent of even the apostolic churches. I will not allege that the testimony of men, when these men are Christians of the first centuries, the contemporaries and the immediate successors of the apostles, may have been specially directed of God, and preserved from error; though I could show that this has indeed been the case. But what I wish to prove, is not, properly speaking, the infallibility of primitive tradition: it is the existence of an infallible church. To this end it suffices to consider tradition as an historical testimony, without urging the warrants of Divine protection, which render its

authority equal to that of the written word. Here, then, in this point of view, is a short and peremptory reply to the objection I have just mentioned. It is, that were the objection valid, it would produce no less an effect than the overthrow of Christianity itself. It would sap its very foundation. For this tradition, which some affect to distrust, is indispensable to all parties in order to demonstrate both the authenticity and integrity of Scripture; and also the miracles and prophecies, which demonstrate, in their turn, the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments. Men must be consistent with themselves: if they reject tradition, they must reject it in every case. Then, indeed, they may refuse to admit its testimony in favour of an infallible church; but they must also refuse its testimony in favour of the inspiration of the Scriptures. Is it to this that they would bring us? At all events, madam, it is not to this that you wish to be brought. On the other hand, if we receive the testimony of tradition in favour of the Bible, there is no reason why we should doubt the testimony of this same tradition in favour of the church. We may then, I think, pass boldly over this pretended difficulty, and without scruple, invoke the aid of tradition to establish the existence of an infallible tribunal. We shall find the proof of this in several passages drawn from the writings of the most ancient and

universally venerated among the fathers. I must not forget that I write for a lady. Two or three quotations will suffice me.

St. Irenæus was the disciple of St. Polycarp, who had been the disciple of St. John the Evangelist. You see that Irenæus was almost contemporary with the apostles. This holy martyr, when contending with the heretics, did not rest his arguments on the Scriptures alone; he especially brings forward against them the invariable faith of the universal church. "It is by this perpetual and uniform tradition," says he, "it is by this faith preached by the apostles, received into the world, and preserved to the present hour by the bishops who succeeded them, that we confound all those who convoke unlawful assemblies, from whatever motive it may be, from self-love, blindness, or malice." After having indicated the succession of the bishops of Rome, he adds, farther on, addressing certain heretical sects:—"I wish to show them the force of tradition, and the absolute power it exercises over the heart and mind. There are still many barbarous nations,—I call them barbarous as to language; but as to sentiment and doctrine they are wise and well-pleasing to God, since they dwell in righteousness and chastity. All these nations, I say, have received the faith of Christ, without paper or ink. They have nothing more than the doctrine of salvation written in their hearts by the Holy Ghost:

and know no other rule of faith than the ancient tradition, which they faithfully preserve, touching God the Creator, and Jesus Christ, his Son. Their forefathers, instructed by the apostles, or the first disciples, have thus learned the tradition, and have transmitted it with the same fidelity to their descendants from father to son : not having hitherto had any heretical assemblies among them." (*Against Heresies*, book iii. chap. 3.)

Thus the belief of these simple people rested, not on the Scriptures, but on tradition ; and yet we find that St. Irenæus, writing so near the time of the apostles, far from condemning, approves them. There was, then, according to St. Irenæus, independent of the Scriptures, an authority, whose decisions were law : there was an infallible church.

Another father, Tertullian, who wrote at the beginning of the third century, declares also, "that we cannot know what the apostles have preached, except from the churches which they have founded, and which they have taught, first, by word of mouth, and afterwards by letter. All doctrine which agrees with that of these apostolic and mother churches, which are as ancient as the faith itself, is the true doctrine ; since it is that which the churches have received from the apostles ; the apostles from Jesus Christ ; Jesus Christ from God." This language supposes that the universal church preserves the apostolic doc-

trine, without probability of error : and Tertullian is so far from consenting that any private person should be allowed to oppose the testimony of Scripture to that of the church, that he adds these remarkable words:—"Even should the issue of these disputes on Scripture not be equally favourable to both parties, the order of things would still require that we should begin by the examination we are now about to make. To whom does the faith itself belong? to whom the Scriptures? from whom, by whom, to whom, and at what time, has the Christian doctrine been transmitted?"—*Prescriptions against Heretics*, sec. xix. xxi.

I could also quote St. Cyprian, the disciple of Tertullian, who wrote, in his Treatise on the Unity of the Catholic Church, "that the church founded by St. Peter, is never separate from Jesus Christ ; that the bishop is in the church, and the church in the bishop ; so that he who is not with the bishop, is not in the church ; that this chaste spouse of Christ Jesus cannot be corrupted ; that it preserves us for God ; that he who forsakes the church of Christ will never receive the recompense of Christ ; and, in fine, that he who has not the church for his mother, cannot have God for his Father."—*Unity of the Catholic Church*, end of letter lxviii, and under Eph. iv. 4.

But I fear lest I should tire you, madam, and I hasten to mention St. Augustine. No doctor

enjoys a higher reputation for piety, science, and genius; and none more clearly affirms the existence of a Catholic church, "which, set upon a hill, as the gospel saith, must be known throughout the world, and cannot remain hid. It is only in her bosom that one can find sure and certain unity; so that it should never be abandoned, on any consideration."—*Against the Letter of Parmenian*, book iii. chap. v. sec. xxviii. This church being the only one which has attested the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures, is also, according to St. Augustine, the only one that is able to explain them; and those who believe it in the one instance, says he, ought, by parity of reason, to believe it in the other. This is precisely the same argument which I have just employed respecting tradition. Can any thing be stronger than what this holy and learned man has written on the subject, to the disciples of Manicheus:—"As for myself, I would not believe the gospel, did not the authority of the Catholic church determine me to do so. If, then, I hearken to those who tell me to believe the gospel, why should I refuse to hear them when they tell me not to believe in Manicheus? There is but one alternative. Either you cannot show me any thing in the gospel which is evidently favourable to Manicheus; and in this case, I would believe the Catholics rather than you; or you will find there some formal testimony in his favour;

and then I should believe neither the one nor the other. I should not believe them, because they would have deceived me respecting you; nor you, because you bring forward a book which I have only believed on the faith of men, who, according to this supposition, would have deceived me."—*Against the Epistle of Manicheus, called Fundamenti*, chap. v. What signifies this language, if there is not a visible church on earth; an infallible tribunal charged with the interpretation of the Scriptures, whose inspiration it alone has been able to guarantee?

I could multiply testimonies without end. But those which I have produced are sufficiently numerous and important to show, that from the origin of Christianity, men have believed in the authority of the church, and in the necessity of implicit submission to its decisions. In order to doubt the truth of this, we must not only refuse to accredit these testimonies, but also deny a number of well-authenticated facts, which prove that such was the general conviction. If we come to this, it remains for us to explain how this belief suddenly arose, how it has become prevalent, and has been established throughout the world, without our being able to discover its commencement, or to indicate either those who first proposed or those who have resisted it; or, in short, to show any traces of this controversy. The fact, that this belief has been produced and

authorized by long custom, till it has the force of law, affords an argument of great weight. For, if we consider how contrary the doctrine of an infallible church is to the self-will of man, (as you know by experience, madam,) we may affirm, that the authority of the church is sufficiently proved, by the fact alone, that it has been recognised. In a case of this kind, success is justification; and it is as impossible to explain the universal establishment of this authority, if it be not legitimate, as to account for the propagation of Christianity in the world, if God have not taken the cause in hand. Such is the argument drawn from tradition, or, if you will, from history. I cannot contract it so as to suit the limits of a letter, without diminishing its force; but I think that I have said enough to convince a mind like yours, which, indeed, requires good reasons, but knows how to be satisfied when it has found them.

You ask for proofs, madam; I give you three. If you consider that any one among them, taken separately, is not perfectly conclusive, you must at least admit that they complete and strengthen each other; so that, when united, they are irresistible. They have appeared such to a Pascal, a Bossuet, a Fenelon, a Massillon, and to the brightest luminaries of the church in all ages. The excellent men whom I have just named, though divided in opinion on a few points of

minor importance, are all agreed in recognising an infallible church, and the admirable order which Christ has established in its bosom ; subjecting the faithful to their pastors, the pastors to their bishops, and all the bishops of Christendom to the Romish See ; where ends this wonderful Catholic unity, which embraces the whole earth, and has no equal in the history of mankind. How beautiful is this exclamation, which escaped from the heart of Bossuet, in the Assembly of 1682, when he was defending the rights of the Gallican church : —“ Holy Romish church, mother of churches, and mother of all the faithful, church chosen of God to unite his children in the same faith, and in the same charity ; we will ever seek the preservation of thy unity with the most yearning solicitude ! ” I cannot, indeed, conceive how any humble-minded lover of the truth can resist such weight of evidence. I know that you could show me, in the communion in which you were born, and even among your reformers, both learned and virtuous men. Far be it from me, madam, to adopt the calumnies which, during the last few years, some have taken the pains to utter against them. But you know the power of prejudice, even over an upright mind. Add to this, the temptation suggested by pride and independence, which so easily glides into the hearts of such as possess superior faculties ; and you will see nothing in the history of all dissenting churches for

which we cannot readily account, even admitting the truth of what I have just demonstrated.

But the history of these churches would itself furnish a fresh proof of the necessity of a visible tribunal. The great Bossuet very clearly shows this. The history of these churches is but that of their variations. Hardly, indeed, can they be called churches. The name of sects is much more applicable to them : so ready are they to separate themselves into fractions, which again are subdivided without end. And why should we wonder at this? The principle once established, they must submit to its consequences, as they will not have a judge to decide in cases of controversy. Dissenting sects can have no centre of authority ; and having no authority, they can have neither certainty for the faithful, nor unity in the church. "Every one," says Bossuet, "has made a tribunal for himself, in which he constitutes himself the arbiter of his belief ; and though it would seem, that these innovators had wished to restrain the minds of men, by confining them within the limits of the Holy Scriptures, yet as this has only been on condition that each believer should himself become their interpreter, and should imagine that the Holy Ghost will show him their meaning, there is not a private individual who does not conceive himself authorized, by this doctrine, to adore his own inventions, to consecrate his errors, to make God the creature of his own imagination.

From thence it has been truly foreseen, that license being no longer subject to any restriction, sects would multiply to infinitude; obstinacy would become invincible; and whilst some would engage in endless disputes, or would set forth their reveries as inspiration, others, weary of so many idle vagaries, and no longer able to recognise the majesty of religion, thus torn by so many sects, would, at length, seek a fatal repose, and entire independence, in indifference or in atheism.* This same Bossuet showed Claude, in his famous discussion with that minister, to what lengths the Protestant principle must lead him: and, it is said, addressed to him this original question: "Do you think, sir, that a poor old woman can possess as much light as a whole assembly of bishops?" it is added, that Claude was rather embarrassed by this inquiry. It is, in fact, a somewhat perplexing one. But, madam, this subject must be painful to you. I do not think it will be necessary for me to enlarge upon it, after all that I have said on the authority of the church. And, moreover, you must be well aware of the evil; so much the more aware, because you were born a Protestant.

Allow me, madam, to warn you against something which your last letter suggested. Be not jealous of the authority of the church, as though

* Bossuet, Funeral Oration on the Queen of England.

it obliged you to abandon a part of your liberty. To yield in such a case is not to give up one's liberty ; it is to make use of it : and you ought rather to rejoice that the church gathers and keeps in store for you all the fruit that you might expect from the reading of the Scriptures, while it spares you the danger of their perusal.

Yes, madam, the danger ! It is too true, too clearly proved by sad experience, that man, who abuses every thing, may also abuse the word of God ; and that this holy rule of faith and practice may be injurious both to practice and faith, where it is given up without precaution to every individual. "The law," saith St. Paul, "is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good ; but sin, that it might appear sin, worketh death in me by that which is good," Rom. vii. 12, 13. We find in the Bible actions contrary to all our received maxims, and nevertheless approved or commanded by God ; with many other things difficult to believe, and which might astonish those who are not well-grounded in the faith. We, also, find narratives opposed to all our notions of decency, and which might be a subject of scandal to one brought up in the refinements of the present day. I will not, however, enlarge on this point. Few persons are gifted with sufficient simplicity and strength of mind to bear the reading of the entire Bible. There are not many, besides the priests, who can endure so strong a light ; and, conse-

quently, it is to them that the Scriptures have ever been intrusted. Moses expressly says this. "When Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, he commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law," Deut. xxxi. 24—26.

This is, moreover, the opinion of a man whose respect for the Bible no one would think of calling in question. Fenelon thus wrote to a bishop :— "It must be confessed, that if a book of devotion, such as the 'Imitation of Jesus Christ,' or, 'The Spiritual Combat,' or, 'The Guide to Sinners,' contained a hundredth part of the difficulties which are met with in Scripture, you would think it a duty to forbid its perusal in your diocese. The excellence of the book would not prevent you from concluding that it ought not to be promiscuously given to the profane and curious ; because this nourishment, though marvellous in itself, would be too strong for them, and they would be unable to digest it." And then this holy bishop concludes his letter by these wise remarks :—"Christians must be instructed concerning the Scriptures, before they are allowed to read them. They must be gradually prepared for them ; so that before they do read them they may be accustomed to hear them, and may be filled with their spirit before they see the letter. Those only must be permitted to read them who are simple, docile, humble ; who seek not to

satisfy their curiosity, not to dispute, not to decide or to criticise, but to find food for their souls. In short, the Scriptures must only be given to those who, receiving the Bible from the church alone, will not seek to discover any other meaning in it than that of the church itself.”*

Is not this, madam, just what I have already said, and which I would take the liberty of again urging upon you, after having given you the proofs which you required, and after having quoted the authority of a Christian so fervent,

* Fenelon, *Lettre sur l'Ecriture*, art. xiii. and xiv. The council of Trent is more explicit than Fenelon:—“As experience has shown, that the indiscriminate reading of the Bible in the vulgar tongue is, on account of the rashness of men, more disadvantageous than profitable, it will depend upon the bishops or the inquisitor, who will have an understanding on the subject with the curé, or the confessor, to permit this reading to those persons whom they will judge able to undertake it without danger, and who will gain from it an increase of faith and piety. This permission will be given in writing. Whoever, without having received a permission of this nature, will dare to read or to possess a Bible, cannot receive the absolution of his sins until he has returned the Bible to his curé. Booksellers who, without having the said permission, shall sell the Bible, translated into the vulgar tongue, will lose the price of their books, which will be set apart by the bishops for pious purposes; they will also be liable to other penalties, according to the nature of the delinquency, and agreeable to the judgment of the bishop. The priests themselves can neither read nor buy a Bible without the permission of their superiors.”—*Concil. Trident. Regulæ indicis*, Reg. iv.

and, on the whole, so judicious as Fenelon. It is zeal for your salvation which prompts me thus to entreat you to submit yourself to the church, and to wait till you have received its instructions, before you indulge yourself in the reading of the Bible.

If, in order to decide you thus to act, you require examples drawn from the Bible itself, I can provide you with one which is in many respects analogous to your own case. Perhaps you may remember the Ethiopian officer, whom Philip, the evangelist, met while reading the Prophet Isaiah. "Philip said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him," Acts viii. 30, 31. Here is a man who begins, like yourself, madam, to turn to the Lord; whom no sacrifice daunts in his pursuit of truth; a man who imagines, in the first instance, that there can be no better means for its discovery than the reading of the Scriptures; but a man who, instructed by this very reading, and warned by a spirit of humility, soon acknowledged that he could not understand them, unless some one explained them to him, and who seized the first opportunity of placing his Bible in the hands of a director. Philip, madam, may be considered as the church; and will not you be as the Ethiopian? Do you think you will be able to do

what this simple and pious man confessed that he could not? and this narrative, the first detailed account of a conversion which is found in the book of the Acts; does it not clearly indicate the road in which God wills that you should walk?

Enter upon it, madam, with faith, with simplicity of heart. Submit to the guidance of the church. To the church, to the church alone, is applicable the remark which you so kindly address to me at the conclusion of your letter:—"How can I fear to err while I submit to your directions?"

P.S. I do not think that I contradict myself, when I advise Mr. de Lassalle to read the Old Testament. His position is very different from yours. I had judged this perusal necessary to convince him of the inspiration of the Bible, and more especially of the fulfilment of prophecy. When once convinced on those points, should he desire to penetrate into the meaning of the Scriptures, I would invite him to rely upon the judgment of the church, just as I have done with respect to you.

LETTER V.

LUCILLA TO THE ABBE.

AFTER the letter you have had the goodness to write to me, I no longer dare persist in my desire

to possess a Bible. Your arguments stagger me, and your warnings alarm me. What am I, a poor ignorant woman, that I should withstand the wisest teachers, and separate myself from the universal church? I see that I must yield, and address myself to those whom you call my natural directors. Well, I will obey. I have reached the term of my irresolution. Why can I not also say, the term of my difficulties?

I must confess that in this instance, I do not feel the same satisfaction which I experienced after having heard your reasonings on the inspiration of the Scriptures. In the reasons which you have given me to-day, I do not perceive the clearness, the simplicity, the evidence, which I found in your former arguments. I was then convinced without reservation, and was happy to be so. Now I feel as one who has no reply to urge, but who would not be sorry to find an answer. The head is convinced, but the heart is not so submissive as I could wish.

Because, in spite of myself, this idea is constantly recurring to my mind, that I ought to read the Bible, since it is of God. It is, as it were, an instinct which sets aside all arguments, which resists them, perhaps . . . But no, I resist no longer. I am decided to adopt the way which you advise; and if it is the right one, as I hope, as I believe, God will doubtless enable me to find

in it that peace to which I am still a stranger. Be easy, I will not purchase the Bible.

The Bible, which first opened my heart! the Bible, which you have taught me to call the book of God! the Bible, which has inspired you with an admiration you know so well how to communicate to others! I have read the "Catechism of the Council of Trent," and the "Stories of Royaumont." These books are excellent, doubtless, since you recommend them; but they do not speak to my heart. They are not like the Bible. Do not forsake me, sir. Pity me. Pray for me. I know not what to think of my own thoughts. I make a very unworthy return for all your goodness; and I fear lest I should weary your patience. Here I will pause. I know not whether I shall decide to finish this letter, or to burn it.

I have not shown your letter to my husband. I would rather wait until my own views are less wavering. Considering the state of mind in which we both are at present, I fear we should only weaken each other.

The same Day, Evening.

I am more perplexed than ever. You will find it difficult to believe what I am about to relate. Is it a direction from God? Is it a snare laid for my soul? You will be better able to judge of

this than I am. Hardly had I laid down my pen an hour, when we received a visit from Mr. Mercier. He is an old friend of Mr. de Lassalle; and you may, some years ago, have seen him at our house. His affairs have brought him into this part of the country; and he has had the kindness to come out of his way for the purpose of paying us a visit. He dined and spent the evening at the castle. It is ten o'clock, and he has only just left us. Almost all our conversation has turned on — what think you? On religion!

Mr. Mercier was born a Catholic, and lived till he was upwards of forty years of age in the practice of his religion, as well, or rather as ill, as a great many others. But within the last year or two he has become, I was going to say, a Protestant; but, in fact, I know nothing about it; for he has not once pronounced that name. What is very certain, is, that he is changed, and that in reading the Bible; and I suspect that he has come here on purpose to convert us. I cannot blame him for it. I have always thought, that a man who believes himself in the right way, fulfils a duty in seeking to lead others into the same path.

Mr. Mercier was the first that led the conversation to this subject. My husband, though much cooled since your first letter on the reading of the Bible, then proposed several questions, which

were suggested, as I easily perceived, by what he had heard and read from you. I was very much inclined to do the same, in my turn, but was restrained by the thought of your advice. I feared lest I should expose myself to some temptation. I remained silent, and Mr. Mercier must have found me extremely reserved.

I will not conceal from you, sir, the fact, that my coldness was merely assumed; and that I listened with eagerness to the explanations which he gave my husband. Will you believe it? His views bear a wonderful resemblance to those which I expressed in my last letter to you. Mr. Mercier has passed through the same state of perplexity in which I am at present. He long hesitated whether he ought to read the Bible. He, at length, determined to do so, and blesses God that he was led to such a decision. A new day, he says, has arisen upon his soul, since he ceased to allow man to interpose between it and God.

We gave him your manuscript to read. He admired it much, and said to Mr. de Lassalle, when he returned it, "I have rarely seen the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures at once so clearly and so briefly established; the evidence affords almost mathematical certainty. Nevertheless," added he, after a moment's reflection, "unless the Spirit of God speak to the heart of a man, even these proofs will not convince him. I

have experienced this myself. It is one thing to have the mouth closed, and another to have the heart opened."

O sir, with what warmth, with what eloquence, he speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, of what he has suffered for our sins, and of what we owe him in return! He is so penetrated with this subject, that it has made him quite another man; as serious as he was formerly trifling; swearing no more; no longer yielding to anger. My husband could not overcome his surprise. He said to me, "If Mercier were born a second time, he could not be more different from what he was."

I flatter myself, my dear sir, that in this instance you will appreciate my distrust of myself. But I have a project in view, which I will not put into execution till I have submitted it to your approval. I should like to write to Mr. Mercier, and ask him what are the reasons which have determined him to read the Bible for himself. I would fain hear what he has to say on the subject. I think that I shall then be fully enlightened. This will not prevent me from yielding to you in the end; but I shall do so with a more tranquil mind, after having heard the contrary arguments. And then, as I shall have them in writing, I shall not run the risk of being taken by surprise. I can meditate on them at leisure. I can ask your opinion concerning

them. Pray, my dear sir, indulge me in this fantasy. Or, rather, to speak seriously, do not refuse me that which is almost necessary to satisfy my conscience. Your opposition would cruelly embarrass me; for you know my deference to your judgment. I shall expect your answer with much impatience.

LETTER VI.

THE ABBE TO LUCILLA.

So then, madam, you are not yet at the end of your questions. I had foreseen this. You find yourself upon a declivity, where you will find it difficult to arrest your steps. Oh that this warm heart, this unquiet mind, would at length seek repose in the bosom of the church! Oh that this ardour which consumes you, were but peacefully spent in the service of the Lord!

You perplex me in your turn. I dare not direct you in so delicate a matter, especially as I have no other right or claim upon you than that with which your confidence has invested me. I fear, I must confess, that in writing to Mr. Mercier, you will enter upon a perilous path; doubly perilous with the disposition of mind in which you now are. But can I forbid your doing so? Even were I more assured of your docility than

is the case, ought I not to fear lest I should lead you to doubt my reasons, by preventing you from hearing those of others? And again, perhaps it is necessary for you to hear them, in order to discover their weakness. From my knowledge of you, I am sure that you will imagine them good until you have heard them. However this may be, I cannot encourage, but I dare not restrain you. Consult your Curé. Perhaps he will have more liberty, or more light, than I have.

LETTER VII.

LUCILLA TO MR. MERCIER.

SIR—The day on which we had the pleasure of seeing you at the castle, I heard you say, that after having long believed that every layman ought to refer to the church for the interpretation of the Scriptures, you changed your opinion two years ago, and that you now seek the meaning of the Bible for yourself, without placing any man between God and you. This was your expression, which I well remember. Might I take the liberty of asking you, what are the reasons which have led you to adopt such a determination? I shall be much obliged to you if you will kindly enlighten me on this point. Doubt not that your

reply, in spite of certain appearances, will be to me an object of the deepest interest. I confide in your discretion.

LETTER VIII.

MR. MERCIER TO LUCILLA.

MADAM—Be assured that you confer an obligation upon me, when you provide me with an opportunity of explaining my faith, and of giving glory to the word of God ; and if my feeble testimony can engage you to read that word in your turn, I shall render thanks to the Author of every good thought. For what the Bible has done for me, it will do for you ; it will do for all who receive it, “ not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God,” 1 Thess. ii. 13. You wish to know the reasons which have determined me to read the Bible in this spirit. In order to satisfy you, I must go back a few years, and give you a full account of the change which God has deigned to work in my heart.

I was born at the time of the Revolution, when every creed was rejected. My infant lips were never taught to breathe a prayer ; in my childhood I was taught no other catechism than that of Dupuis and his fellows ; and at sixteen I knew by heart the ignoble witticisms of the “ Philosophical Dictionary.” In my youth I never re-

ceived what is called the "first communion ;"* and till the age of thirty, I was totally unconnected with the Christian family, except by baptism. As to the Holy Scriptures, like many others, I made a jest of them, without having any further acquaintance with them than what I derived from the quotations of Voltaire.

Being at Strasburg, in 1827, I heard of Oberlin, the humble, but celebrated pastor of the Ban de la Roche. He was mentioned, not as an eminent Christian, but as a great philanthropist. I went to see him. I found more than I sought. I found him not only superior to what I expected, but altogether different. Doubtless, I admired the genius, fraught with industry and beneficence, by which he had succeeded in converting an almost savage district into one which hardly yields to any other department in France, for true civilization. I could not, without emotion, see this good pastor, who, while still fulfilling all the duties of his holy calling, had erected factories, found means of exporting their produce, laid down roads, constructed bridges, renewed the face of the soil, introduced the culture of the potatoe ; labouring himself when necessary, with pickaxe or spade in hand, at the head of his parishioners, whom he called his children. But what especially attracted my attention was the principle of all this. The heart of Oberlin interested me even

* Equivalent to English confirmation.

more than his labours, and I almost forgot the philanthropist in thinking of the man of God. He did good with so much simplicity, so much forgetfulness of self, and so much happiness, that it was easy to see he did it for God, as much, at least, as he did it for man. I then, for the first time, understood Christian piety, by beholding it in practice. This spectacle made a deep, an indelible impression upon me ; and I said to myself, "The religion which has produced such a man deserves examination : the belief which renders him so contented in the midst of privations, and far from the world, is a thing to be considered." You see, madam, God employs more than one means of bringing souls to himself. A worthy priest convinced you of the inspiration of the Bible, by arguments as solid as they are eloquent. The good Oberlin taught me the truth of the Christian faith by the Christian life. Argument came after.

At parting, Oberlin gave me a New Testament. I received it as a book which would explain the character of Oberlin, and read it in the course of a few days. I found many things in it which appeared to me absurd ; with others, the greater number, which I thought admirable. Being wounded in the face a short time after, during a military exercise, and almost deprived of sight for several weeks, I could not study my book ; but I had retained a few passages, which at times con-

soled me. I said to myself, "Perhaps this really is the word of God." "The word of God!" this thought sent a thrill through my very being. Even during the time of my infidelity I had my better moments, like every one else. I then wished to know what was *true*, and to do what was *right*. But, the truth, the right, how was I to discover them? Where could I find a positive rule, a perfect model? Every thing that proceeds from man may be controlled by another man. But if there were a word of God, what a difference! We should then have a solid, an immovable foundation. This appeared so glorious, that I dared not believe it.

A friend came to my help; he was a pious priest, who, in many respects, resembled the one whose conversations on the inspiration of the Scriptures Mr. de Lassalle showed me the other day. Thanks be to God, we have more priests of this stamp in France than is generally imagined. He, seeing my doubts, advised me to read the New Testament, and, at the same time, to ask of God to enlighten me. "It was thus," added he, "that I myself became a Christian." I did as he recommended; and I soon remarked these words of Jesus Christ: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Luke xi. 13. This encouraged me to pray for the Holy

Spirit. I then began to feel my sinfulness, and my need of a Saviour; and then to recognise in Christ the spotless sacrifice who offered himself to God for us. As yet, however, my views were very confused. But I was surprised to find nothing in the New Testament on the worship of the saints, and of the Virgin, nor on auricular confession, nor on the mass, nor on many things which I had been taught to regard as essential to Christianity. I soon had an opportunity of again seeing my friend, the priest, and of opening my mind to him. He was evidently alarmed at his own work, and endeavoured to rectify it. I do not blame him; that he was sincere, and desired my good, I cannot doubt. He believed the gospel, but he also believed the church; and when he saw that the one did not lead me to the other, he thought it his duty to restrain me. However this may be, he urged me to consult a director, both in the choice of what I read, and in regard of its interpretation.

I felt this to be a sacrifice; but, at this period, I had too much conviction, and too little light, to resist a man whom I had learned to consider as a model of piety. Had Oberlin been alive, I should perhaps have had recourse to him, Protestant as he was; but he had died a year before; so I placed myself in the hands of the church. From that time every thing changed. As I could only read the New Testament, to find a doctrine

previously determined, I found it shorter to study this doctrine in the catechism, and in the books of devotion which were recommended me. As my heart grew cold towards the gospel, I soon felt that my religious impressions grew cold also. The Holy Spirit no longer occupied any place in my thoughts. I imagined that my spiritual conductors possessed it for me. In a short time, I had nothing left but a borrowed Christianity, which satisfied my director without satisfying me, and which, in all probability, would have ended by my relapsing into infidelity, if God had not interposed, and withdrawn me from the freezing hands of man. As to the priest of whom I have spoken, we were then far distant from each other; and he had done me so much good, and so much harm, that I knew not how to write to him.

I was in this state, madam, when, about two years ago, I met a friend of Oberlin, whom I had seen at his house, in the Ban de la Roche. We spoke of the good pastor. I saw tears in the eyes of Mr. Z * * *. I was deeply affected; my old impressions revived; I remembered the New Testament of Oberlin. In short, I related to Mr. Z * * * all that had occurred. It seemed to me, in some respects, as if I were consulting Oberlin himself. I was not mistaken; this simple-minded, but sensible and pious man, showed me the error in which I had been involved; and, by clear and solid arguments, drawn mostly from

the Bible itself, he convinced me that I ought to seek God, without allowing any man to interpose between Him and me. He succeeded so much the more easily, as he had my own experience in his favour; and I resumed the reading of the New Testament, to which I soon added that of the Old. God, to whom I again addressed my supplications, opened my heart to his word, and enabled me to find what St. Paul so fitly calls "grace and peace."

There is in the Bible a word which seems to have been used with a special reference to my benefit. It is that of Rock. This name is often given to Jesus Christ, to signify the immutable firmness of his doctrines and of his promises. A rock in the midst of the quicksand of human opinions: this was, indeed, just what I required. And even now, my heart thrills whenever I meet with this term; so that I often exclaim, "I will look unto the Rock that is higher than I."

The reasons which determined me, madam, and which you desire to know, are those which Mr. Z * * * gave me. I am quite ready to explain them to you. But will you allow me to make an inquiry? Your letter leads me to presume, that you have some scruples as to the reading of the Bible. If such be the case, they have doubtless been suggested to you, as they had been to me; for they are far from being natural. Can you tell me the origin of these scruples? I should

then be better able to suit my explanations to your state of mind ; as my friend of the Ban de la Roche did for me. However, if you consider my question indiscreet, do not reply. I will wait twelve days, then, if I do not hear from you, I will write again, under the supposition that you experience the same difficulties which for some time arrested me.

LETTER IX.

LUCILLA TO MR. MERCIER.

I AM about to give you a great proof of confidence. But how can I doubt the discretion of one who writes as you do ? It is true, that some one has given me scruples as to the reading of the Bible. It is the same priest who proved to me its Divine origin, a true minister of God, an eminently good man. You will find inclosed a copy of two letters which he has written to me on the subject. I shall expect your second letter with impatience. You know not how much the first has interested me.

LETTER X.

MR. MERCIER TO LUCILLA.

“THERE is nothing new under the sun.” I have just read the letters which you have so kindly

shown me. They are a sacred deposit, of which you may be assured I shall not make an unworthy use. The reasons which are given by your respectable friend, for not allowing the reading of the Bible to laymen, are almost word for word the same as those which were alleged to me. I now see that even if you had not intrusted me with the secret of your scruples, I should have been nearly sure to hit the mark, by ascribing to you all those which were formerly mine.

I am not sorry, however, to have the letters of the Abbé Favien before me, and especially his second. I shall follow it from point to point; and the perfect order with which he has explained his views, will enable me to put a little into what I shall say in reply. I really feel a sort of shame in thus combating the arguments of one who is, in so many respects, my superior: but you have consulted me, madam; and it is my duty to declare the truth. Remember, it is not a theologian who addresses you. It is a retired artillery officer, who has nothing wherewith to supply the advantages of which he is destitute, but the desire to convince. This desire, at least, is sincere and profound. I can say with the psalmist, "I believed, therefore have I spoken," Ps. cxvi. 10.

How I love this good old Abbé! Do not imagine that his letters destroy the favourable

opinion which his conversations on inspiration had led me to form of him. Doubtless, I believe him to be in error; but in this error he shows so much sincerity, and so much zeal for your salvation, that I esteem him even when he defends it. It is easy to see, that this same man, who so much fears your reading the Bible, has himself read it, and read it with profit. Marvellous contradiction of the human mind! Wonderful power of habit and of prejudice!

Nevertheless, madam, we cannot but perceive a striking difference, in point of solidity, between the arguments contained in these letters, and in those of the conversations. The advocate is still the same, but the cause is altered. The terms are ill-defined. The words "church," "tradition," etc. are far from affording a clear and precise meaning. Neither is it easy to perceive the exact bearing upon the question of the passages from the fathers, and from the Scriptures, which are adduced in testimony. In short, a sort of *chiaroscuro* pervades the arguments of the Abbé. One feels, after having read them, more dazzled than enlightened, and more embarrassed than convinced. And yet, they should have very clear, very strong reasons, who consider that they have a right to say to others, "Do not read the word of God yourselves; we alone can understand it, and explain it to you." Another thing struck me; it is, that the author of the Letter frequently

contradicts the author of the conversations; and that several of the fruitful and luminous principles, which directed Mr. Favien in his first discussion, are wanting in the second. I shall cite you more than one example of this in the course of my reply.

These remarks are applicable from the very first, to the terms in which the Abbé has put the question. There are, says he, two ways of interpreting the Bible: one is, to confide in your own private judgment; the other, to submit to that of the church. This would all be very well, if the Abbé had to deal with Rationalists. It is thus that I denominate those self-styled Christians who would subject the teachings of the Bible to their own reason. The Abbé may well condemn their principles; and I condemn them also. But we who submit to the Bible, as to the word of God, have nothing in common with such men. We place not our confidence in the dictates of our own spirit, but in the Spirit of God. We do not say that each believer ought to rely on his own private opinion; but we say that he ought to read the Bible, at the same time praying to God to enable him to understand it. Surely, this is very different. Let us not seek to throw discredit on one another's statements, by placing them in a false point of view. The Abbé, I am persuaded, has only confidence in the pope and his councils, because he thinks that God has

promised to guide them by his Spirit; and we, in our turn, only trust in our private judgment, because we think that God has promised to guide us by the same Spirit. In reality, we both put our trust and confidence in the grace of the Holy Spirit; but the point on which we separate is this: according to the Abbé, the Holy Spirit only speaks *indirectly* to each believer, through the organ of the church: according to us, the Holy Spirit speaks *directly* to every believer, and without the intervention which he supposes. It is on this account that every believer, according to the Abbé, ought to leave to the church alone the charge of interpreting the Bible; and that, according to us, he ought to read it for himself, with prayer for the light of God's Spirit.

The question being thus put, let us consider the proofs which the Abbé gives in support of his opinion.

He begins by a preliminary remark, the professed object of which is to simplify his task. He says, that it will be sufficient for him to prove the existence of an infallible church in general; seeing that this church, if it exist, can be no other than the Catholic. In this method he thinks that he can establish the infallibility of the Roman Catholic church, by arguments in which it does not expressly figure. I can easily understand that this way of reasoning simplifies the Abbé's task; and this *simplification* is usually

adopted in the present day by writers who support the same doctrine. Perhaps they hope, by generalizing their theory, to escape the overwhelming difficulties which are so often urged against the church of Rome, the pretensions of Rome, the bishops of Rome. One would think that the Abbé was afraid of this word. He seems, like a true Gallican, to affect its avoidance as some ultra-montane authors affect its perpetual use. But I cannot conceive that he should ever be able, by this means, to afford any solid proof. The point of application, which they affect to disdain, in order to fix their attention on the principle alone, is, in this case, the capital point. What you want, is to know whether you ought to receive, as infallible, some determinate authority, to which you are directed to apply for the interpretation of the Scriptures; and not whether there exists somewhere upon earth an infallible authority. What purpose would it answer, madam, for you to know that somewhere in the world there is a Saviour, if you are not also taught that this Saviour is Jesus Christ? The general proposition, they tell you, implies the particular. It is rather the particular proposition which implies the general. Should they demonstrate the infallibility of the Roman Catholic church, that would doubtless suppose the existence of an infallible church on earth; but does the existence of an infallible church necessarily prove the in-

fallibility of the Catholic? Not in the least. And by what means can they prove the general proposition, when it is isolated from all application? They can never prove it. I mistake; it is, on the contrary, the only means by which it might be proved. It must be so estranged from practice and reality, it must be rendered so vague, that proofs may be given in its favour, if not convincing, at least difficult to refute, because difficult to be apprehended. Thus they gain two objects at once. They get rid of the particular proposition, which cannot be demonstrated, by uniting it to the general question. And they render the general proposition demonstrable, by dint of abstraction, separating it from the particular question. All this, madam, inspires me with extreme distrust. So tortuous and crooked a path was never that of the truth.

In speaking thus, I have no intention of taxing the worthy Abbé with want of uprightness. If his reasoning is subtle, it is less his fault than that of his cause, which cannot bear more solid argumentation. Probably, he does not perceive the too great adroitness of his manner, because prejudice and long custom have warped his noble character, and led him to the use of means unworthy of him. I make this remark once for all. I must be allowed to express myself freely concerning the arguments of the Abbé: and truth

will constrain me, more than once, to be severe in my judgment; but in doing this, I consider his personal character to be altogether out of the question.

However this may be, I deny that he has succeeded in proving the general proposition, in which he has prudently taken refuge. He gives what he calls three proofs in its favour. They ought, he says, to complete each other; so that what is wanting in one will be found in the rest. I do not see that, madam. I say with the author of the conversations:—"It is better to have one good string to your bow than two bad ones." And as he has separately discussed Rousseau's three explanations of prophecy, I also will examine, one by one, the considerations by which the Abbé thinks he can establish the existence of an infallible church.

FIRST PROOF.

ARGUMENT : REASON.

On this point I shall confine myself to a few words. This proof is rather to be set aside than refuted.

The Abbé infers from the insufficiency of private judgment in the interpretation of the Scriptures, the necessity of an infallible tribunal. I could reply, that this argument only concerns

Rationalists. Because the human mind is insufficient, when left to itself, does it follow that it is so still, when led by the Spirit of God? For this, I repeat, is our belief.

But should the argument be even brought to bear, it is utterly powerless. All this is only pure conjecture. They go back to the birth of Christianity; they seek the means by which God has ensured its spread and protection; and they say, they dare to affirm, "This is what he ought to have done. He could not possibly have done otherwise." But what are we, that we should prescribe to God, the way which he ought to take? Can we not then be mistaken in our suppositions? And what authority will the doctrine of an infallible church possess, if it rests only on our fallible reason?

The Abbé could make this very remark to Mr. de Lassalle, when combating his arguments against the Divine origin of the Scriptures. It seemed impossible to Mr. de Lassalle that God should have revealed himself to man, or that he should have done it in this manner. But the Abbé shows him that, ignorant as we are of the designs of God, we ought not to inquire *what he ought to have done*, but *what he has done*. This is what I say in my turn, madam, on the question which now occupies us. The point is, whether the Spirit of God prefers to speak directly to each believer, or to speak to him indirectly, by the

church. Now, I maintain, that no man has a right to decide this question, by the authority of his own reason ; and that, instead of seeking what God ought to do, it is more humble, and more certain, to seek what God has done ; in other words, to consult the Scriptures.

The famous comparison of the code proves nothing. We may well say, in this instance, comparison is not reason. In fact, two things are here compared, which are totally dissimilar—the judgment of God, and that of man. Doubtless, when there is question of the judgment of men, a visible tribunal is requisite, because the judgment of men is exercised on visible objects, and refers to the actual state of things. But it does not thence follow, that there must be a visible tribunal for the judgment of God, which is exercised over the heart, and the consequences of which are eternal, and invisible to eyes of flesh.

Acknowledge then, madam, that the first proof which the Abbé gives you, does not, cannot, demonstrate his theory. But then, how is it that this proof is precisely that in which the defenders of an infallible tribunal seem to take the most delight ? I was one day present at a conference, which took place between a priest and a minister, in the presence of several witnesses, at the request of the Marquis of —. It had been agreed, that each of the speakers should bring with him a second, to support him in case of need. But the

discussion having turned on the Holy Scriptures, the priest's second expressed himself to this effect :—" I find myself obliged to withdraw from the dispute. I am not a believer. I only came to support the Abbé D—, from purely philosophical considerations ; but as you appeal to the Scriptures, and to faith, the only argument that I could use would be out of place ; and therefore I must be silent." What say you to this, madam ? A priest calls to his aid a friend, who is an unbeliever, and who only defends the church on philosophical grounds ! Does not this fact give you a true estimate of the price which they attach to this kind of argument ? and is it not worthy of remark, that a church which calls upon the faithful to disregard all reasoning, in order to submit to itself, makes an abuse of reasoning to establish its authority ; thus uniting the abdication of reason in others with its exaltation for the church itself ?

I go to the second proof. Permit me to reverse the order followed by the Abbé, and to begin with tradition. He has reserved this article for the last, doubtless because he thought it the one most calculated to persuade you. But I have a similar reason for ending by the scriptural proof, which is, in my opinion, both the most important, and the most decisive. It is not the less my intention to treat the question of tradition with every

necessary developement. This will be the object of my next letter.

LETTER XI.

MR. MERCIER TO LUCILLA.

Is it true, madam, that the primitive church believed in the existence of an infallible tribunal, to which the faithful ought to submit, without reserve, for the interpretation of the Scriptures? The Abbé seeks to prove this by quotations from the fathers. Let us see whether he has succeeded.

SECOND PROOF.

TRADITION.

Should all the testimonies which are adduced by the Abbé Favien, be as conclusive as he imagines—should it be certain that the Christians of the first centuries, and the fathers themselves, believed in the existence of an infallible tribunal—this would not suffice for its demonstration, if it could not be established by Scripture. For the Scriptures alone can be the rule of our belief, in matters of doctrine. The Christians of the first centuries, the fathers themselves, may have been

mistaken. You must not be offended at this supposition; it would be easy to justify it by facts. I could show you that in passing from the New Testament to the writings of the fathers, the descent from Divine infallibility to human fallibility, is not only very perceptible, but also that the fathers have fallen into positive errors; and that they are not always agreed, either with each other, or with themselves. But on this point I will confine myself to a shorter course, which I have learned from the Abbé. “A church which is infallible,” says he, “must apparently be aware of the fact.” I say, in my turn, if the fathers were infallible, they would undoubtedly have known it. Now, they expressly declare the contrary, and make this difference between their books and the canonical Scriptures, that the latter alone ought to be believed without reservation, and that the former ought not.

Hear St. Augustine:—“Prove by any one of the canonical books of the apostles or prophets, the truth of what Cyprian has written to Jubaianus, and I shall no longer have any grounds for opposing it. But what you advance, not being canonical, I use the liberty to which the Lord has called us; and whatever may be my estimation of a man, whose merits I can never equal, whose numerous writings are far superior to mine, whose genius charms me, whose eloquence enraptures me, whose charity fills me with admiration, and

his martyrdom with respect ; I cannot submit to his decision.”* Hear again this fine passage from St. Cyril of Jerusalem :—“ When we have to deal with the Divine and holy mysteries of our faith, we must neither advance anything without the authority of the Divine writings, nor allow ourselves to be carried away by the charms of language, or the display of argument. Neither must you believe what I tell you on my own authority, without being sure that my instructions are demonstrated by the Divine writings : for the security of our faith depends not on artifices of languages, but on the testimony of the Divine writings.”† And, lastly, hear St. Athanasius :—“ Here,” said he, speaking of the canonical books, “ here is the source of salvation ; let him that is athirst drink of their Divine oracles. It is by these alone that we can learn the evangelical discipline of piety. Let no one add anything thereto ; let no one take anything away.”‡

This is enough, madam, to show that the au-

* *Contra Cresc. Gramm.*, lib. ii. cap. 32. *Oper.* vol. vii. p. 610. See also what the same father wrote on this subject to St. Jerome, (*Ep. ad Hier.*, tom. ii., quoted by Pictet, *Théologie Chret.*, p. 130 :) “ For the books contained in the Scriptures alone, called also canonical, have I learned to feel that respect, which leads me very firmly to believe that no one of their authors has committed any error in writing them.”

† *Cathec.* iv. p. 30.

‡ *Epist. Fest.* xxxix. *Oper.* vol. ii. p. 45.

thority of the fathers is not sufficient of itself alone to decide a point of doctrine, and especially so capital a point as that which now occupies us. It is insufficient, according to the fathers themselves; and one must indeed have a great zeal for them to grant them more credit than they are willing to accept, and to respect them so far as to disobey them. So that what I said a short time ago, concerning reason, I now say concerning tradition. It is fallible, according to its own avowal, and a fallible testimony cannot prove an infallible authority.

But here the Abbé brings forward a specious reflection, which he deems decisive. "Whoever refuses the testimony of tradition on one point," says he, "cannot consistently admit it on another. If you think that it cannot prove an infallible church, you ought also to say, that it cannot prove the Divine origin of the Scriptures; and then what becomes of our faith?" The Abbé here falls into an error which he had so well refuted when answering your husband's objections to Christianity. Mr. de Lassalle said, "If reason is not capable of judging doctrines, neither is it capable of verifying powers." The Abbé replied to this by a very simple distinction. "This judgment and this verification, being two very different things, reason may indeed be incompetent for the one, though it may be competent for the other." I will say as much for tradition.

Tradition, which is a testimony of men, is not competent to decide a question of doctrine, such as the existence of an infallible church ; but it is competent to authenticate a fact, such as the genuineness of the Scriptures, or the truth of miracles. I know that the Abbé invokes, in support of his assertion, an argument of St. Augustine ; but even should the meaning of this eminent father be the same as that of Mr. Favien,* the reasoning of St. Augustine can prove nothing against reason. It remains certain, that to judge doctrines, and to verify powers, are things so different, that no conclusion can be drawn from one to the other.

Yet it is but just to acknowledge, that if the immediate successors of the apostles, and (to extend the limit as far as we justly can) the fathers of the first three centuries, had unanimously taught the existence of an infallible tribunal, it would be, I do not say an absolute proof, but a strong presumption in its favour. For though the

* St. Augustine admits that if a passage were found in the Gospel evidently opposed to the instructions of the Catholic Church, the authority of this church must be rejected. This language supposes, not only that every one ought to read the Bible for himself, but also that he ought not, in any case, to admit an interpretation manifestly contradicted by the sacred text. This is enough to show that St. Augustine did not believe in an infallible interpretation, in the same sense in which it is now understood by the defenders of the Romish church.

fathers cannot be considered as authority, like the Holy Scriptures ; yet they can show us how they were understood in the first ages of the church, when the faith must have been purer, one would think, because nearer to its source. Let us then confess, if it had been every where believed, in the churches founded by the apostles, and directed after their death by the pastors who immediately succeeded them, that God had established an infallible tribunal, for the interpretation of the Scriptures, there would be reason to believe that this doctrine came from the apostles, and consequently that it was true. But, madam, the fathers do not affirm this. A general belief in an infallible tribunal did not exist in the primitive church ; and the Abbé only finds it there, because he strangely mistakes the meaning of the fathers ; having given to some of their expressions the sense which they would have in his own mouth at the present day, instead of that which they had in theirs.

This kind of mistake is not rare in the interpretation of the fathers. Let us cite an example, which is connected with our subject. The word *tradition*, which the Abbé uses several times in this part of his letter, often, in the fathers, has a meaning so different from that which it bears in the present day, that certain passages from the fathers which are used to establish the doctrine of tradition depose against it. You know, madam,

that by tradition is generally understood "the word of God not written, which the apostles received from the lips of Christ, which they have verbally transmitted to their disciples, or to their successors, and which has descended to us by the teaching of ministers, the first of whom were instructed by the apostles."* Tradition, then, is essentially composed of articles *not written* in the Bible; and thus furnishes supplementary instruction, intended to complete that of the written word, which is not considered sufficient of itself. Tradition, thus defined, is supported by passages from the fathers, in which the same word in effect occurs; but has it the same acceptation? This they have forgotten to inquire. The fact is, it generally occurs with a different, and even opposite, meaning. It does, indeed, signify oral instruction, but is composed of exactly the same articles which are treated of in the written word; so that tradition, instead of being a non-written supplement to the written word, is nothing else but the written word itself, repeated by word of mouth. Here are two proofs of this, among many others. In the famous passage of St. Irænaeus, which is perpetually alleged in support of tradition, and which the Abbé cites in his turn; what is this "ancient *tradition* faithfully preserved by these barbarous nations, who have

* Bergier, Dict. Theolog., art. Tradition.

received the faith of Christ without paper or ink?" Is it some precept on which the Scriptures are silent? No. It is the great truths with which the Bible is filled; it is "the doctrine of salvation, concerning God the Creator, and Jesus Christ his Son:" and this doctrine, you will observe, not interpreted by an infallible tribunal, but "written in their hearts by the Holy Ghost." My second authority is St. Cyprian. "From whence has this pretended *tradition* taken its rise? Is it descended from the authority of Christ, and from the Gospels? or does it come from the instructions and the Epistles of the apostles? God himself attests that we are bound to practise *what is written*. If, therefore, we find it prescribed in the Gospel, or contained in the Epistles, or in the Acts of the Apostles, let us then observe this Divine and holy tradition."*

After this truly inconceivable confusion, you will not find it difficult to believe that other mistakes may have been made. And I have no hesitation in saying, that the Abbé has quoted the fathers according to his own ideas, and not in conformity with theirs, when he makes them assert the existence of an infallible church.

* Epist. lxxiv. Op. vol. ii. p. 211. It is a remarkable fact, that the Jews and the heretics alone have believed in tradition as it is taught by the Abbé Favien. See, for the heretics, Irenæus adv. Hæret., lib. iii. c. 1, 2, p. 169, 170; and for the Jews, Pictet, Théolog. Chrét., p. 115.

This is their real meaning, which is quite different. The fathers argued against heretical sects, who introduced new dogmas, unsupported by Scripture. In opposing them, the fathers urged the constant and universal faith, which had been transmitted and maintained in the churches since the time of the apostles, and said, "How can we believe you, when all these churches are ignorant of your doctrine, and receive a contrary one? How, for instance, shall we believe you, Arius, who arose three centuries after Christ, to inform us that he is merely a created being; whilst all the churches founded by the apostles, those of Jerusalem, Antioch, Athens, and Rome, with all the others born of these mother churches, those of Constantinople, Alexandria, Carthage, and Lyons, have constantly taught, and still teach, that he is the true God and eternal life?"

This is a very simple argument, madam, and one that I could have urged in their place; I, who do not believe in an infallible tribunal. It is an argument often used by orthodox Protestant ministers, in controversy with Socinians. They allege against them the unvarying doctrine of their churches since the Reformation, and the unanimous agreement of their creeds. What do I say? They allege against them the very testimony of the primitive churches, which the fathers urged against the heretics of their time. The conclusion which the Abbé draws from this argu-

ment of the fathers has, in reality, no more foundation than if he were to conclude that the church of England believes in an infallible church, because its only rule of faith is the Holy Scriptures, but the Scriptures as they were understood by primitive antiquity.*

To appeal to the constant belief of the churches, is not to proclaim an infallible church. For, in the first place, no particular church is meant; but all the churches, or the church of Christ in general. Secondly, and especially, infallibility is not meant to be attributed to this church of Christ, but only fidelity. It is one thing for a church to be established of God for the interpretation of the Scriptures, and another thing for it to have received grace to understand them.† All that the language

* Such also is the doctrine of the minister Claude, in the following passage:—"Our faith has two relations: it is the daughter of the word of God, and the sister of the faith of the ancient church. Holy Scripture is the Divine principle, alone necessary and all-sufficient to give it birth; the consent of the church is a human principle, often calculated to promote its discernment."—Pictet, *Théolog. Chrét.*, p. 131.

† Observe these words of Tertullian (*de Præscr. adv. Hær.*, sec. 9. *Oper.*, p. 105:)—"Granting that all the churches have erred, shall we say that the Holy Spirit has not looked upon any of them to bring them back to the truth; he who was expressly sent by Christ, and expressly asked of the Father, to teach truth? Shall we say that this Minister of God, this Vicar of Christ, has neglected his work, and suffered the churches to understand and believe otherwise than he had himself taught the apostles to preach?"

of the fathers supposes is, that God always reserves to himself a faithful church on earth, which preserves his doctrine, if not entirely free from error, at least free from any capital error, incompatible with salvation. In addition, let us remark, that if the argument here used by the fathers may be employed at any period, it had especial force at a time when the remembrance of the apostolic teaching was recent, and when the faith had not yet undergone those general and essential changes which we have since had to deplore.

Should any one attempt to support the interpretation which the Abbé gives to the fathers, here is decisive authority against it, that of the fathers themselves. They believed, according to the Abbé, in an infallible tribunal, to which the believer ought to submit, without reserve, for the explanation of the Scriptures. But you will now hear them say, on the contrary, that the Scriptures alone are infallible, and that every one ought to consult them for himself.

Since they speak so much of St. Augustine, let us begin with him. In writing against the sect of the Donatists, he says:—"Why do you produce the authority of Cyprian for your schism, whilst you reject his example for the peace of the church? Who does not know that the canon of the Holy Scriptures is contained in limits which are very clearly defined; and that it ought to be placed above all the letters which may since have

been written by the bishops? For, as to the Scriptures, neither doubt nor discussion is possible, on the truth or justice of whatever is found incontestably written therein. But the letters of bishops, which have been written, or which may still be written, since the canon has been fixed, may be controlled in case of error, either by the more enlightened opinion of some more skilful divine, or by the greater authority or more extended knowledge of other bishops, or by the decisions of councils. The national councils, or the provincial, in their turn, ought to yield without contest to the authority of the general councils, assembled from all parts of the Christian world. Lastly, it is not rare for the general councils themselves to be set right by succeeding councils, when longer experience has opened what was sealed, and brought to light what was unknown."*

Will you, also, read the following testimonies, and judge whether they accord with the Abbé's sentiments, or with mine? "Let the shop of Hermogenes prove that what it advances is written; or if it be not written, let it fear the malediction uttered against those who dare to add or to retrench."† "The holy and divinely

* De Bapt. contra Donatist., lib. ii. c. 3., Oper., vol. vii. p. 37.

† Tertullian adv. Hermog. 12. Oper., p. 346.

inspired writings are sufficient, of themselves alone, to make known the truth.”* “If you desire a new quotation, if you pretend to affirm any thing besides what is written, why do you dispute with us, who are resolved to hear nothing, and to say nothing, besides what is written?”† “It is a mockery to ask questions, or to make discourses, on that which is not written.”‡ “What the Scriptures have not declared, you will never find.”§ “It is evidently a falling away from the faith, and a proof of great presumption, to neglect any part of what is written, or to introduce any thing that is not written.”|| “What is written, believe; what is not written, seek not to discover.”¶

I conclude by a passage from St. Chrysostom, which bears directly on our subject:—“When we receive money, we do not trust to those who give it to us; we wish to count it ourselves: and when there is a question of Divine things, would it not be a folly rashly and blindly to receive the opinions of others, when we have a rule by which we can examine every thing? I mean the Divine law. It is for this reason that I conjure you all, without resting in the slightest

* St. Athanasius, *Orat. contr. Gent.*, Oper., vol. i. p. 1.

† The same, *De Incarn. Chr.*, Oper., vol. i. p. 484.

‡ The same, *Epist. ad Serap.*, Oper., vol. ii. p. 29.

§ The same, *De S. Trin. Dial.*, Oper., vol. ii. p. 172.

|| St Basil, *de verâ fide*, Oper., vol. ii. p. 386.

¶ The same, *Homil. de Trin.*, xxix.

degree on the judgment of others, to consult the Scriptures.”*

After what we have just seen, madam, we may boldly affirm, the fathers have been misunderstood by the Abbé; they do not say what he makes them to say; they even say the contrary.

I do not wish to appear more learned than I am. The greater part of my quotations have been furnished by a friend, well versed in these matters. I also hold from the same authority, that among the writings of the fathers, quoted by the Abbé, there are some which appear to have undergone alteration. The treatise of St. Cyprian, on the Unity of the Church, is especially suspected of interpolation. But it is not requisite that I should engage in this critical discussion. I consider the question in a point of view at once more general, and more suited to my capabilities.

The Abbé terminates this article, by a remark to which I shall only say a few words in reply. From the fact that the belief in an infallible church has prevailed in the world, he thinks that we may conclude that God is for it. Success appears to him to justify the pretensions of the church; as the establishment of Christianity proves its Divine origin. But the cases are far from being similar. Whilst Christianity clashed

* Homil. xiii. in 2 Cor., quoted by Pictet, p. 136.

with every received idea, every interest, and had no human aid whatever, the doctrine of an infallible church met with much less resistance, and found great support. Self-will is opposed to it, says the Abbé. This may be true in your case, madam, but with the generality of minds, just the contrary is true. They find it very convenient to be exonerated from the heavy responsibility connected with the search of salvation; and the natural unbelief of the human heart is but too well satisfied to treat with man rather than with God. Besides, this doctrine has, alas! been early aided, to what extent we are well aware, by secular power. I will not institute a comparison, but if any one were inclined to do so, he would perhaps find more analogy between its success, and that of Mohammed, than that of Christ. There is another remark which is applicable to this point. The New Testament announces a church which shall turn away from the truth, and which shall extend its dominion over almost the whole Christian world. In this point of view, madam, might not the argument which the Abbé alleges in favour of his infallible church, be turned against him?

But it suffices me to have shown you, that in neither of these two proofs, which we have just examined, will you find that sure resting-place, that rock on which alone your faith can repose unshaken. Imagine yourself stretched on the

bed of death. Is it a logical deduction, is it the testimony of man, that can give peace to your soul, in presence of the judgment of God? Can you say, I am sure that my sins are forgiven me, for I know it by argument, or from history? Ah! madam, if, instead of all this, you had a promise from God, a word from the Bible, a single word; is it not true that this would give you much greater tranquillity? Let us, then, learn what the Scriptures say on the question which now occupies us: the Scriptures which we all agree to consider as the word of God. Let us listen to them without prejudice. If it be true, as the Abbé says, that they send us back to an infallible tribunal, we will receive it; if not, we will reject it. For it is written, "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper," 2 Chron. xx. 20.

P.S. I see by the Abbé's first letter, that you have been led to entertain doubts respecting the versions of the Bible sold by the colporteurs. They have been represented to you both as falsified and mutilated. Now, that we are about to examine the Bible, a few words of explanation on this subject will not be useless.

The Abbé has done justice to the first of these accusations, with a fairness that does him honour. My testimony will add nothing to his, with respect to the Catholic versions. As to the Protestant version, sold by the colporteurs, I have

attentively compared them with that of Saci, and with the other approved versions. I have found no other difference in the New Testament besides that which is always found between two translations of the same work. The meaning is the same, the expression alone varies. It is even difficult to decide which of these versions is preferable. The Catholic ones are more elegant, more French ; the Protestant have a more antique tinge, and more closely follow the original. For a long time, I preferred the former ; now I am of a different opinion, because what I especially seek in a translation is, to have the sense of the inspired author with scrupulous fidelity, were it even a little servile. I habitually use a Protestant version, and from it I shall make my quotations in writing to you. But this is only matter of taste, and every one is free to choose. That which is most essential is, to know that the reproach of falsification is a mere calumny.

But in the Old Testament there is a real and important difference between the versions of the two communions. The Catholic versions contain several books which the greater part of the Protestant versions do not, because the Protestants consider them as apocryphal, or uninspired.

I learned from Mr. Z * * *, that they are led to this conclusion by the following reasons : 1. These books have never been recognised by the Jews, who are the guarantees and depositaries of

the Old Testament, as the Christian church is of the New: for, "unto them," said St. Paul, "were committed the oracles of God." 2. They do not exist in Hebrew, but only in Greek; an additional proof that they do not form a part of the canon of the Old Testament, of which Hebrew is the original language, as Greek is that of the New. To these two principal reasons he added three others; that these books have never been quoted in the New Testament, that they were not admitted into the canon of the primitive church;* lastly, that it suffices to compare them with the canonical books to feel that the same Spirit could not have presided at the compilation of both. "As Oberlin said," added he, "in passing from the canon to the apocrypha, one experiences the same feeling as in passing from the apostles to the fathers."

These reasons are grave, and have induced me to purchase the version of Saci, such as it is sold by the colporteurs, without the apocrypha; and the following considerations ought to set your

* The reader who wishes to obtain full information on this subject, will do well to consult Bishop Cosin's "Scholastical History of the Canon of Scripture:" a work of vast learning and research. The author proves that the apocryphal books were never acknowledged as inspired, either by the Jewish or the Christian church; and that canonical authority was first claimed for them by the Romish council of Trent, which was held in comparatively modern times.—TRANS.

mind at rest. Remark, in the first place, that all the books received as canonical by the Protestants, are equally received by the Catholics. In reading these books, as inspired, you therefore risk nothing. You have not, according to the Abbé, the whole Bible; but you have, according to the Abbé himself, nothing beside the Bible. In case of doubt, this is a safer way than to expose one's self to the danger of ascribing to the Holy Spirit books which are none of his. Besides, this difference does not affect the New Testament, which is exactly the same in the two communions. So that you have only to begin as I did, and as the bishop of Montauban authorized the people of his diocese to do, by taking the New Testament, and taking the version of Sacy; for the rest, God will guide you.

In a word, all that is said against the books of the colporteurs has no other object than to awaken unfounded scruples in the minds of men, and thus to prevent them from reading the word of God. The true question does not lie there. Is the Bible the book of all, or is it but the book of the few? This is the capital point. When it has been solved, the rest of the difficulties will solve themselves.

LETTER XII.

MR. MERCIER TO LUCILLA.

At length, madam, we are in presence of a very intelligible question, and on determinate ground. What we want to know is, whether God wills that we should seek the meaning of Scripture for ourselves ; or whether we should ask it of a visible tribunal : and, in order to learn this, we are about to consult the Scriptures themselves ; a book which we have before our eyes, and which we have only to read.

Others, beside Mr. Favien, will perhaps tell you, that there are many who cannot read ; that as the versions are not inspired, we cannot be assured of their exactness, without researches of which every one is not capable ; and, moreover, that before you thus consult the Bible, you should already have decided the question, as to whether we can understand it or not. But the Abbé has too much right feeling to propose such objections, or rather such sophisms. There are many who cannot read ; well, they can hear the Bible read. It is comparatively unimportant whether they actually see what is written, or only hear it. We cannot be assured of the exactness of the versions ? But is it not true, madam, that, without knowing English, you may be assured of the fidelity of a

translation of Milton, by the testimony of credible men, who know this language? Now, in this instance, you have more than the testimony of a few individuals; you have that of numberless divines, and of entire churches. Moreover, let them choose which they will among all the received versions, Catholic or Protestant, that of Saci, that of Amelot, that of Martin, that of Ostervald; the most imperfect is more than sufficiently clear for my purpose. But you cannot tell, until you have decided the question of a visible tribunal, whether you are able to understand the passages which refer to this very subject? If such be the case, we shall never decide it. What! they conclude that the Bible is subject to the interpretation of a human tribunal, without even allowing it to say a word on the matter! They dispose of the word of God, without even consulting it! With this principle they may go any length. Truly, all that they can reasonably require is, that we should confine ourselves to plain and simple quotations; and this, you will see, I shall do. If they distrust your judgment so far as to think you incapable of understanding even passages of this nature, why should you be even less incapable of understanding the explanations of the church? If you cannot take a step without infallibility, it will no longer suffice for the church to be infallible; you must be so yourself. But the good Abbé who makes use of the Bible to support

his theory, cannot take it ill if we use it in the support of ours.

Let us, then, open the Bible, to learn what it teaches on the subject of its own interpretation.

THIRD PROOF.

HOLY SCRIPTURE.

In the first place, let us inquire whether the Scriptures are in favour of Mr. Favien's doctrine. He has produced his texts; we have only to examine them.

Let us begin by a general remark on the use which he makes of Scripture. It is with grief I observe that the Abbé, in several instances, quotes Scripture unadvisedly; applying the declarations of this holy volume to subjects with which they have no connexion. Here are several examples of this. When it is said, 1 Pet. ii. 18, that we ought to be subject even "to the forward," the apostle speaks of the duties of servants towards their masters; the Abbé, of those of the faithful towards their pastors. The "sincere milk," of which the same apostle speaks, 1 Pet. ii. 2, is the milk of the word of God; (see ch. i. 25 :) the Abbé mentions it as the milk of the church. "The letter" which "killeth," 2 Cor. iii. 6, is the Jewish law; and "the Spirit" which "giveth life," is the Holy Spirit, shed abroad under the New Testament dispensation.

The Abbé gives to these two words the sense which they have in ordinary language, but which is altogether foreign to the subject of St. Paul. This "holy law," by which "sin worketh death," Rom. vii. 12, 13, is the commandment of God, which condemns transgressors to death: the Abbé takes it for the word of God, to which St. Paul makes no reference in this passage. Lastly, the "private interpretation," against which St. Peter forewarns the faithful, 2 Pet. i. 20, is a private interpretation of the prophet, and not, as the Abbé supposes, a private interpretation by the reader.* The doctrine of the apostle is this:—"Prophecy ought to be explained, not by the private sentiments of the prophet, but by the designs of God." Thus, when you meet with the terrible imprecations which are found in the Psalms, you must consider them, not as expressions of vengeance on the part of the psalmist against his enemies, but as the inspired declaration of the holy wrath of God against his foes. It is evident, that such is the

* It must be confessed, that certain Catholic versions, even that of Saci, which the Abbé has followed, countenance the error into which he has fallen, by adding the words "is explained by," which are not found in the original. The literal translation is, "No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private solution." Some of the ancient Catholic versions render it thus: "No prophecy of the Scripture is by private exposition."

meaning of St. Peter, from the reason which he gives for this declaration: "For prophecy came not in the old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." You see, from these examples, that the Abbé sometimes quotes Scripture falsely; an error which is too common among the defenders of an infallible tribunal. This will oblige you, madam, to verify the quotations yourself. But I speak of verifying the quotations;—and, perhaps, you have not a Bible! If such be the case, I must strongly express my regret. It is most desirable that you should have one before you while reading my letters. Let us now examine the texts cited by the Abbé; which you will have the goodness to re-peruse. (P. 124—126.)

Let us go at once to the point. In these two pages of quotations, which one might imagine would contain the strongest passages in favour of an infallible church, that are to be found in the Bible, (and they have been sought after for more than a thousand years,) do you find a *single* passage which formally proclaims that God has established an infallible tribunal for the interpretation of the Scriptures? And, especially, do you find one which says, that this tribunal is to be found in the Roman Catholic church? You see that I wander a little from the general proposition to which we agreed to confine ourselves; and I

enter for a moment on the particular question of the infallibility of the Romish church, because the Abbé's logical display cannot hold good ; and in presence of the word of God, it is impossible not to inquire whether it does not afford, at least, a few words in favour of this specific church, which is, after all, in practice, that to which we ought to listen, as to God himself. Surely, they must expect this, if the doctrine of the Abbé be true. For this point is fundamental, quite as fundamental as that of original sin, or redemption. We may even affirm that it is more so, in one sense ; because everything else depends on this one article ; and an infallible tribunal, once admitted, neither original sin, nor redemption, nor any other doctrine, can be received but with its consent. And if there should indeed exist, somewhere on earth, a body to whom God has intrusted the work of explaining his word, what can be more urgent than the discovery of it ? With it, I possess the whole truth ; without it, all is error. It is as if I were told that Christ is on earth, in person ; and that I can go and interrogate him on all that concerns my salvation. Oh ! show me this infallible tribunal, this second revelation, without which the first becomes useless ! O Lord, show me the truth, in which my soul's salvation is involved ; on thee alone will I rely. Doubtless, thy word will enlighten me.

Acknowledge, madam, that this prayer would be very natural ; and, moreover, that it would be fully justified by the manner of God's dispensations. Recall to mind with what clearness he made known to the Israelites, under the Old Testament dispensation, that it was in Jerusalem that the solemn feasts were to be celebrated ; and there that the sacrifices prescribed by the law were to be offered. He does not confine himself to stating, that in some corner of the world there exists a city in which he designs to receive the homage of his people ; Jerusalem is expressly named. The distinction is carefully established between the tabernacle, which was destined for a time to answer this holy purpose, and the temple of Jerusalem, which was to be substituted in its place from the time of Solomon. This was so far the case, that king Jeroboam no sooner attempted to establish an altar elsewhere, than he immediately fell into idolatry. While the Old Testament thus speaks a language so clear, would the New, which, by every one's confession, possesses much more light, and a fuller development, leave us in the dark on a point connected with the very principle of our salvation ? Nevertheless, there is not a text to the point, madam ; not a single one ! St. Paul, who, in his fourteen Epistles, has treated of all the great questions of our faith—St. Paul, who addressed the longest of these epistles to the church of Rome itself, says not a word on the subject !

St. Peter, who has written two letters, addressed to so many churches at once, and so complete in their brevity—St. Peter, who, according to the Abbé, has the key of this immense edifice, does not even mention it! Jesus Christ, who with so much condescension forestalled the inquiries of his disciples, that he one day addressed to them these touching words, “If it were not so, I would have told you,” John xiv. 2, speaks not of it! Not one among them says a single word of a Catholic church, nor of an infallible church, nor of a tribunal charged with the explanation of the Scriptures. What think you, madam, of this silence? does it not speak louder than words? Would God leave us to conjectures, or to inductions only, always more or less uncertain, on the very foundation of our faith. No, assuredly no; a thousand times no!

But what, in fact, are these inductions, on which they wish you to risk your eternal interests? Let us take, in the first place, the celebrated promise of our Lord to St. Peter, Matt. xvi. 18, and let us pause a little thereon; since, among all the Abbé’s quotations, it is the only one in which, according to his views, the Romish church allows itself to be perceived, though on a very dim and distant horizon. He has not enlarged on this point; but his meaning is sufficiently evident, being that of all the partizans of an infallible tribunal. In this passage they see

St. Peter as the vicar of Jesus Christ on earth ; then St. Peter, as bishop of Rome ; and lastly, St. Peter transmitting his prerogatives to the bishops of Rome, his successors. They see all this ; but do you see it, madam ? Here is a promise for the church : “ The gates of hell shall not prevail against it ; ” (to this we shall recur ;) and here are, also, personal promises for St. Peter, to which we must confine ourselves for the moment.

These promises, and especially the first, have received more than one interpretation. Let us admit that which is the most favourable to the Abbé’s opinion : the church of Christ will be built upon St. Peter. Let us admit this, though it has not the authority of the fathers in its favour ; for the most ancient among them have preferred to see in “ the rock ” on which the church of Christ was to be built, either the person of Christ, or the testimony which his disciple had just borne to him ; seeing, says St. Augustine, that “ it is not the rock which is upon Peter, but Peter who is upon the rock. ” * Even with this interpretation,

* “ Non petra super Petrum, sed Petrus super petram. ” Justin, the most ancient of the fathers who have written on this passage, gives us to understand that the rock on which our Lord has promised to build his church, is St. Peter’s *confession of faith*. (Justin, *Dial. cum Tryph.*, Oper., p. 255, Sylbourg. 1593.) According to St. Athanasius, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, it is Jesus Christ himself. (Athan., *Unum esse Christ.* Orat., Oper., vol. i. p. 519, 520, Commel, 1600. Hieron.

the promise made to St. Peter does not suppose that he was established the vicar of Jesus Christ. It is explained quite naturally, like so many other of Christ's promises to his disciples, by the book of the Acts of the Apostles; a practical commentary, where we may learn, by facts, how the apostles understood these promises, and what

Comment. in Matt. xvi. 18, lib. iii. Oper., vol. vi. p. 33. Colon. 1616. August., Expos. in Evang. Johan., Tract. cxxiv., Oper., vol. ix. p. 206, Colon. 1616.) Chrysostom contradicts himself in his explanation of this word. In one passage he understands it to apply to the person of Peter, but in another, he very explicitly condemns this interpretation, and sees in the "rock" the confession of the apostle. (Chrysost. Homil. lxi. in Petr. Apost. et Eliam Proph., Oper., vol. i. p. 856; Serm. de Pentecost., Oper., vol. vi. p. 233, Commel, 1603.) This last sentiment is also that of St. Hilarius, (Hilar. de Trin., lib. vi. Oper., p. 903, Paris, 1693;) and appears to have been shared by Cyril of Jerusalem. (Cyril. Catech. xi. p. 93, Paris, 1631.) Origen himself, who in one of his writings takes the "rock" for the person of Peter, explains himself elsewhere in very different terms: "The rock is every disciple of Christ. If thou believest that God has built his whole church on Peter, and on Peter alone, what becomes of John, the son of thunder, and the rest of the apostles? Dare you assert that the gates of hell shall not prevail against Peter in particular; but that they shall prevail against the other apostles, and against the most accomplished Christians? (τῶν τελείων.) Is it not for all the apostles, for each of them, that it has been said, 'The gates of hell shall not prevail against it?' And again, 'On this rock will I build my church?' The keys of the kingdom of heaven, have they been given to Peter alone? And ought none of the other disciples to receive them?" (Orig., Comment. in Matt. tom. xii. Oper., vol. i. p. 275.)

accomplishment they have received. The promise now in contemplation is illustrated by the second and the tenth chapters of this book: by the second, where we see St. Peter the first to announce the gospel to the Jews; by the tenth, where he is the first to announce it to the heathen: so that he opens the kingdom of heaven both to the one and the other, and lays the first stone of each of the two churches, of which the universal church is composed. Surely it is a glorious privilege granted to St. Peter, as a recompence for his having been the first among all to confess Jesus Christ, openly and publicly, as the Son of God; a circumstance judged so worthy of remark by the inspired historians of Christ, that it is among the small number of those which have been related by all the four.* But of St. Peter being constituted the vicar of Christ, of a supremacy in the apostleship, there is not a word. Besides, this supremacy is positively contradicted by the history of the Acts, where we see St. Paul occupying a rank at least as high as that of St. Peter; and by the Epistles, where we hear the same St. Paul declare, that he is "not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles," 2 Cor. xi. 5; and that he "withstood Peter to the face" on one occasion, "because he was to be blamed," Gal. ii. 11.

* Matt. xvi.; Mark viii.; Luke ix.; John vi.

But even should it be true, that St. Peter was the vicar of Christ, this would prove much for St. Peter, but nothing for the Abbé's theory. He can only support it by adding to his text two points, which you I am sure will never perceive there : first, that St. Peter was bishop of Rome ; secondly, that he transmitted his powers to his successors. And this is what they call proving a thing from the Bible ! In vain your argument places one foot on this rock of ages ; whilst the other rests on empty space ; it must inevitably fall.

“ St. Peter was bishop of Rome ! ” We cannot even ascertain whether he ever was at Rome. Some of the fathers affirm this, others deny it. But observe, madam, even those who attest that St. Peter visited Rome, are not agreed as to whether he was bishop of that city. Thus, according to St. Irenæus, St. Peter founded the church of Rome, with St. Paul, but was not its first bishop ; the first bishop of Rome was Linus.* This remark suffices to overthrow the whole of the Abbé's scaffolding, if you will allow me such an expression.

And then, if St. Peter had been bishop of Rome, would it follow that his successors must inherit all his powers ? This transmission ! one

* According to the Apostolic Constitutions, likewise, (lib. vii. c. 46,) they say, in so many words, that “ St. Paul ordained Linus first bishop of the church of the Romans.”

would imagine it to be so simple a thing, that it is not even necessary to prove it; and, in fact, there is not the shadow of a proof in its favour. St. James was, according to the unanimous testimony of antiquity, the first bishop of Jerusalem; did his authority pass to his successors? In truth, madam, had there been a succession of the nature of that which the Abbé has supposed, on the faith of so many others, one might much rather have expected it for the church of Jerusalem, than for that of Rome. For the church of Jerusalem had the double privilege of being the first that was founded; whence it was called, by a general council, "the mother of all the churches;"* and that of having incontestably had an apostle for its bishop.†

* That of Constantinople, (Epist. Synod. Concil. Constant. ad Damas. apud Theodoret., Hist. Eccl., lib. v. cap. 9.)

† The pretended transmission of St. Peter's power is very severely judged by one of the fathers, who grants the greatest privileges to this apostle; and in a passage where he shows that, in his opinion, "the rock" signifies the person of St. Peter, in Matt. xvi. 18, Tertullian thus expresses himself, (De Pudic., p. 767, 768,) when addressing the bishop of Rome, who laid claim to supremacy in the church, as being the successor of St. Peter:—"What! because the Lord said to Peter, 'On this rock I will build my church; I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven;' thou imaginest that this power has descended to thee; that is to say, to the neighbouring church of St. Peter! (Petri propinquam.) Who art thou, thus to

One grows weary of combating such vain imaginations. To sum up, madam : in order to agree with the Abbé, you must admit, without Scripture proof, that St. Peter was Christ's vicar ; without historical proof, and contrary to the most authentic traditions, that he was bishop of Rome ; and without rational or any other kind of proof, that his power has passed from hand to hand, to all the bishops of this church. And this laborious argumentation, endlessly complicated by suppositions on Scripture, suppositions on history, suppositions on the designs of God, must be the support of your eternal hopes ! A moving sand, a fleeting cloud, must be the rock of your salvation ! But if the infallibility of the Roman Catholic church remains unproved by Scripture, that does not disturb the Abbé. It suffices him that Scripture clearly proves the existence of an infallible church in general. This is hardly sufficient, in my estimation ; but is even this borne out by Scripture ? Let us examine.

It would be tedious to consider all the passages quoted by the Abbé, in proof of the existence

change and overturn the will of the Lord, which was manifestly to confer this privilege on St. Peter personally ? For he said, *On thee* will I build my church ; I will give *thee* the keys ; and all that *thou* shalt bind and loose ; not that *they* shall bind and loose." (Super *te*, inquit, ædificabo ecclesiam meam, et *tibi* dabo claves ; et quæcumque *solveris* vel *alligaveris*, non quæ *solverint* vel *alligaverint*.)

of an infallible church. Let us confine ourselves to those to which he most confidently appeals.

There is, according to the New Testament, a church, which is "the pillar and ground of the truth ;* with which the Saviour will be present, even to the end of the world ; and against which the gates of hell shall not prevail." Truly, these are glorious promises, which ought to fill the Christian's heart with joy. But do they imply an infallible church ? By no means. We must here repeat the two reflections which we have already made on similar expressions in the fathers. There is no question here of a determinate church, but of the church of God in general ; and the Lord promises to render this church not infallible, but faithful. It suffices for the fulfilment of this promise, that the Lord should always reserve to himself upon earth a church which preserves the essentials of the Christian faith ; this church may be composed of members belonging to more than one particular church. In other terms, the religion of Christ will never perish in the hearts of men ; it will always be preserved in one or another of the branches of the great Christian church. This sentiment has been well expressed by Tostatus d'Avila, who himself

* It is worthy of remark, that St. Irenæus uses the same terms, in speaking of the writings of the apostles : "*In Scripturis nobis tradiderunt fundamentum et columnam fidei nostræ futurum.*"—Adv. Hær. lib. iii. c. i. p. 169.

belonged to the Romish church. "The universal church never errs, because it never errs in all its branches."* This is what God has promised: this is what has hitherto been performed, even at the worst periods; and this will be the case to the end of time. But between this and an infallible tribunal, established for the interpretation of the Scriptures, there is a vast difference.

But, says the Abbé, in the following passages, there must indeed be a determinate church, the infallibility of which Christ guarantees; there must indeed be successors to the apostles, to whose decisions we ought implicitly to yield:—"Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." No, madam, there is no question here of successors to the apostles, still less of infallible successors. A single remark will suffice to over-

* Elsewhere this same writer gives a very remarkable development of this idea:—"The Latin church is not the universal church, it is but a certain portion of it: whence it follows, that even supposing the Latin church had erred throughout, the universal church would not have erred on that account. For the universal church always remains in its branches which do not err, whether they be or be not in greater number than those which err." (Tostat. Abulens, Præf. in Matt. quæst. xiii.; id. quæst. iv. in Matt., ad proleg. 2.) This author lived in the fifteenth century.

throw this interpretation. "He who proves too much, proves nothing," says the proverb. If we were to admit the Abbé's interpretation, these two passages would prove nothing less than the infallible authority of every disciple of Christ. For read what follows the former quotation. After having said, Matt. xviii. 18, "Whatsoever ye shall bind," etc., Jesus Christ immediately adds, "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." This is evidently a consecutive discourse, the whole of which is addressed to the same persons; and it is evident, from the last words I have just quoted, that these persons are simple believers. As to the second quotation, "Whosoever sins ye remit," etc., you have only to compare the chapter from St. John, in which it is found, (John xx. 19—23,) with the Gospel according to St. Luke, (xxiv. 36—49,) to perceive that these two passages refer to one and the same conversation between our Lord and his disciples; and that on this occasion he spoke not only to his disciples, but also "to them that were with them," Luke xxiv. 33. Lastly, in a corresponding passage in the Psalms, where there is question of binding their kings, and executing upon them the judgment written, Ps. cxlix. 8, 9,

it is expressly added, "This honour have all his saints."

I do not deny, that the promise in question was intended, in the first place, for the apostles; nor that it belongs to them in a special sense: but it is certain, from the proofs I have just given, that it, also, has a more extensive acceptation, according to which it applies to every true disciple of Christ. What, then, is the meaning of this promise? I cannot explain it without anticipating what I shall have to say in speaking of the gift of the Holy Ghost, with which it is closely connected. This is very evident from St. John's Gospel, where it immediately follows the promise of the Holy Ghost. "He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." I will now express myself very briefly on this subject. My next letter will contain a fuller explanation of my meaning.

When Christ was upon earth, and when he addressed to the sinner these consoling words, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," this sinner could say, "It is the Lord who gives me this assurance of pardon." But when Christ was no longer here below, what man, what teacher, what apostle could assure us of forgiveness? What will become of the church of God? Will it be reduced to endless uncertainty? And will it have un-

ceasingly to regret that the voice of Christ is no more heard? It is to this important question that the Saviour replies in the promise which now occupies us. He is about to depart; but he will not leave his children comfortless. His Spirit will remain with them, and will speak to them.

The Holy Ghost will speak, in the first instance, by the apostles. He will impart to them supernatural and miraculous gifts, which will be theirs alone, and which will render them infallible teachers of divine truth. Doubtless, they will not, like Christ, reconcile the sinner with God; but they will announce, with the authority of Christ, the word of reconciliation. Thus, when they say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," they may be listened to with as much confidence as the Saviour himself; and the poor jailor of Philippi, who heard none other than St. Paul, might be as certain of his salvation as the paralytic of Bethesda, who had heard Jesus Christ himself.

The same Spirit will also speak by every true disciple of Christ. Having received in their hearts the grace announced by the apostles; confiding in the inspired and infallible writers of the gospel, as these writers confided in their Divine Master; those who are neither inspired nor infallible, will say in their turn, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" and they

will say it with as much confidence as the apostles themselves. O marvellous virtue of the word of God, and of the Spirit of God! O true successors, not of the apostles, but of Christ himself! It is by this that, not only a St. Paul before Festus and Agrippa, but a simple confessor of Jesus—a John Huss before the council of Constance—the most obscure Christian before the world, remits and retains sins, binds and looses, opens and shuts the kingdom of heaven, the keys of which he holds in his hands!

Our promise, then, in one sense, concerns the apostles; in another sense, it concerns every believer; but in no sense does it concern the successors of the apostles. Or rather, the apostles, as apostles, neither have, nor can have, any successors, any more than the prophets. As believers, all believers are their successors. A body of teachers and priests who inherit the infallible authority of the apostles, is nowhere to be found in Scripture. When Christ said, "I am with you alway, even to the end of the world," it is not only with you, apostles, I agree; it is also with you, believers of every age: but where is it said, that it is with you, priests, successors of the apostles?

Distrust these associations of ideas, which pervert the meaning of the Bible, under pretence of completing it. When the Abbé reads, "He that heareth you heareth me," he immediately infers

that the priests must be heard; but Jesus Christ spoke not of them. It must be ascertained to whom the *you* in the text refers: now, it applies either to the apostles, or to every believer. The priests have no more right to rest their claims on this passage, than I should have to imagine I should be king of Israel, because it is written, "Thou shalt be king over Israel." It has, indeed, been said; but to Solomon, not to me. What the Abbé quotes, has likewise been said; but not to the priests, who are not named in his texts, and who are every where introduced by means of this slight addition, after the word "apostles," *and their successors*: an addition with which it has apparently no connexion, and which entirely alters the meaning of these promises. There is but one way by which the pretended successors of the apostles may enjoy these promises; it is by humbly confounding themselves with the believers to whom they are made.

The reconciliation belongs to the Lord alone; the inspired word of reconciliation, to the apostles; the word which binds and looses, to all. Once more I repeat, "This honour have all his saints." In all this there is nothing infallible, but the Lord, his Spirit, and his word.*

* The council of Jerusalem, cited by the Abbé Favien, proves nothing more, in favour of councils, than the promise of binding and loosing, in favour of the priests. The council of Jerusalem was presided over by the apostles. What! because

It is time to conclude, madam. They undertake to prove to you from Scripture, that, instead of reading for yourself, you ought to rely on the interpretation of an infallible tribunal : a fundamental doctrine, and one as to which you have a right to require the most decisive testimony. And what do they show you ? Of passages which interdict the reading of the Bible, not one. Of passages which establish the infallible tribunal, to which they pretend you ought to yield, not one. There remains nothing but five or six declarations, isolated from their context, arbitrarily explained, more arbitrarily applied ; and from these they draw remote and most unwarrantable inductions. Does this suffice you ? Will you risk thereon the salvation of your soul ? Pause and reflect.

For myself, I do not hesitate to say, and you may make the trial, with such a method of interpretation, I engage to find in the Bible whatever you will. Name any system you like, religious or philosophical, Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Mohammed, in short, whatever you choose, I will find it in the Bible, by the Abbé's process of interpretation : a process of which his prejudiced

this council could say, " It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us," does it follow that the council of Constance, or any other, composed, perhaps, of bishops destitute of piety, and presided over by a pope unworthy of the name of Christian, may say so with an equal right ?

mind cannot see the full bearing. What do I say? What I engage to do has been done ; and, what is more, has been done for St. Simonism. Yes, madam, even this immoral, impious, and anti-christian doctrine, has sought support in the Bible, and has found it there. You must remember, that the St. Simonian preachers willingly quoted the Bible, and quoted it sometimes in so specious a manner, as to surprise persons who only knew it from these citations. After this, who would despair, no matter what may be his opinions, of giving them some appearance of conformity with the Holy Scriptures ?

Ah ! thus to employ the word of God, is not to use, but to abuse it. Let us tremble at the thought of wresting from this holy book a forced testimony in favour of a doctrine already fixed upon, and derived from our own invention. Let us rather listen to it with the deepest humility, and receive the doctrine which God has taught there, whatever it may be. Then only shall we treat the Bible with the respect which is its due ; but then, madam, we shall find the right secured, or rather prescribed, to each believer, of reading it himself, with prayer for the aid of the Holy Spirit, to enable him to comprehend it.

LETTER XIII.

MR. MERCIER TO LUCILLA.

*Continuation of the Third Proof—The Bible written
for all.*

IN taking up my pen to-day, for the purpose of showing you, from the Bible, that God permits you, that he commands you, to read it; I feel no other embarrassment than what arises from the clearness, the abundance of my evidence. It is with my subject almost as it is with the existence of God, which the Bible no where establishes, because it is every where supposed. Why should it declare that it must be read, when it was only written to that end? All that I can do, is to choose several passages in which this general tendency shows itself, if possible, more clearly than elsewhere. But it is not to forced interpretations, to consequences laboriously deduced, that I am about to appeal; it is to simple declarations, taken in the first sense in which they present themselves to the mind of a simple man. Of this you shall yourself judge.

Let us begin with the Old Testament. Under this first economy, inferior to ours in light and liberty, what use were the people to make of the word of God?

Moses, the most ancient among the prophets, will reply, Deut. xxxi. 9—13: "And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and unto all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: and that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it." * This law must be read every seven years, to all the people, men, women, and children; simply read, there is no mention made of its interpretation; read entirely, not partially; read in order, that those who heard it might learn to fear the Lord their God. So salutary is this reading.

But this book, the Abbé tells you, "was confided to the care of the priests." This is true;

the book which Moses had written with his own hand, was intrusted to them. It was necessary that it should be delivered to some one; and to whom could it be more appropriately given than to the men whose office obliged them to read it to the people, and to watch over the preservation of the sacred text? But between placing the original copy of the law in the hands of the priests, and giving up to them every succeeding copy that might be made, there is a mighty difference. We must not forget that books were very rare at this period, when they were written by the hand, with great labour. From that time the precautions of Moses were dictated by necessity; * and they are no authority for restraining the use of the holy volume in our more favoured times, when it is accessible to all. Nothing here indicates an exclusive deposit, nor a right of interpretation; nor, above all, a guarantee of infallible interpretation.

Let us, however, finish the verse. You see that Moses has taken care to prevent the false explanation which the Abbé gives of his meaning. For it is not to the priests alone that

* Notwithstanding these precautions, the book of the law had been for a long time lost, when it was found by Hilkiah, at the reparation of the temple by the order of king Josiah. What would have become of it, had it not been confided to the priests, and kept in the temple? Is it not probable that it would have perished?

he confided the book of the law ; it is "to the priests *and to all the elders of Israel.*" The Abbé, doubtless, quoted from memory ; so that he has overlooked this latter clause. Now, the elders were heads of families, men of every profession, and of every tribe. It was then, in reality, to the representatives of the entire people that the law was delivered, to be read to the whole nation.

"But it was only to be read every seven years!" This is not said. They were enjoined to read it in public at least once in seven years, in order that every Israelite might have several opportunities of hearing it in the course of his life. But that did not prevent the guardians of the law from reading it more frequently to the people, nor private persons from reading it in their own houses, if they possessed a copy. As to the public reading, we see, in effect, that it took place under many other circumstances. It was always the first means adopted by pious men, when they endeavoured to revive the piety of the nation : either kings, such as Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. xvii. 9 ; and Josiah, 2 Chron. xxxiv. 30, 31 ; or prophets, such as Ezra and Nehemiah. Neh. viii. 2, 3. 7, 8.* But especially remark the account given by Jeremiah, of the reading of his prophecies before the people by Baruch, his

* In this instance, the reading of the law is followed by an explanation given by the Levites. There were reading and preaching.

scribe. Baruch read this book to all classes of society successively : to the multitude, to the magistrates, and, lastly, to the king and his servants. It was a simple reading ; and this reading was so well understood, that it moved the whole court. The princes were afraid, and the king so irritated, that he cut the roll of Baruch with a penknife, and cast it into the fire.

Listen to the use which the kings of Israel in particular were enjoined to make of the holy volume. "And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life : that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them : that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left : to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel," Deut. xvii. 18—20. Would kings have been less subject than the rest of mankind to the authority of this infallible tribunal, had one existed? It is not thus, madam, that it is customarily taught ; and they would be hardly disposed, I think, to dispense with their obedience on this point of the general law. Here we see the kings of Israel obliged to write with their

own hand a copy of the law, and to read it every day of their lives ; and why ? because this reading will teach them to fear God, and to keep his commandments. If it teaches this to kings, will it not teach it to private individuals ?

Hear, again, the beautiful exhortation addressed by Moses to Joshua, who was not a priest, nor even a member of the tribe chosen for the service of the tabernacle. "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth ; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein : for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success," Josh. i. 8. A governor, the general of an army, ought to meditate day and night in the law of God ; and it is this which shall make his way prosperous : and why should not every other believer apply to himself this commandment, and this promise ? It is not surprising that the instruction of those who exercise the first offices in the state should be specially provided for ; but we cannot conceive that this should be to the exclusion of others.

However, we are not reduced to simple inductions. The same recommendation which was made to Joshua, we here find, almost word for word, addressed to all, and accompanied by the same promise : "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the

way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper," Psa. i. 1—3.

You see, madam, that which essentially characterizes the godly man, that which distinguishes him from the wicked, that which ensures the blessing of God on all his undertakings, is precisely that from which they seek to turn you; reading and meditating upon the word of God. I confess, that if the Abbé could have quoted a single passage of Scripture, where the obligation of yielding to a visible tribunal was as clearly established as the right of reading it one's self is in this, the obligation would be better proved than it is by his three arguments united, even with all their accessory considerations.

As time advances, and as God's people obtain more light, we see the reading of the Bible more recommended, and more general. After what I have just shown you, it will suffice for me rapidly to indicate a few other testimonies from the Old Testament. The Psalms (and how should we wonder at it, after such a commencement?) are full of this doctrine. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The

statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart : the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes," Psa. xix. 7, 8. But all your doubts will soon be dissipated, madam, if you only read Psalm cxix. It is so filled with the praises of the word of God, that, among the hundred and seventy-six verses of which it is composed, there are not more than four or five wherein it is not mentioned, either by one name or another. It is easy to see, that the author of this Psalm fully practised the precept of Psalm i. Read some of these verses, which breathe so ardent a love for the inspired word of the prophets. Ought that of the apostles, that of the Son of God, to be less precious to us ? "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way ? by taking heed thereto according to thy word. Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. Thy testimonies also are my delight, and my counsellors. And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved ; and I will meditate in thy statutes. The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver. Oh how love I thy law ! it is my meditation all the day. I have more understanding than all my teachers : for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I

keep thy precepts. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple. I prevented the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word. Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

Ah! madam, may the day soon arrive when the word of God will be to you all that it was to the psalmist! Are those indeed animated with the same spirit as he—those who suggest scruples as to the reading of the Bible? Scruples as to the reading of the Bible! what a strange association of ideas! And why do they not, also, suggest to you scruples on prayer? No; this respectful distance at which they pretend to keep you from the word of God, the holy prophets knew it not. You cannot, in their estimation, approach it too nearly. Language seems to fail them in describing the strict intimacy which ought to exist between it and you. "Bind them" (the words) "upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk

of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up," Prov. vii. 3; Deut. vi. 6—8.

Obey God, rather than man. Instead of leaving the Bible, to listen to a church, no matter what church it be, leave all the rest, to go to the Bible. "To the law and to the testimony!" This fine exclamation is found in Isaiah, (viii. 20;) and he adds this warning, which ought to call forth your most serious reflection: "If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Yes, madam, "to the law and to the testimony!" This voice resounds from the entire Old Testament. Evidently, its believers were to read and meditate on the word of God for themselves; evidently, there was no infallible tribunal charged with its explanation. And if this tribunal had existed, where should we seek it, but in the solemn assembly of the scribes and priests at Jerusalem? This assembly was so little gifted with infallibility, that it persecuted the prophets, and ended by crucifying the Son of God!

After this, ought we to expect to find the reading of the Bible restricted under the New Testament? Is it more obscure than the Old? Or has the disciple of Christ less liberty than the disciple of Moses? But we will leave the New Testament to speak for itself.

I open this holy volume, and in the fourth

chapter of the first Gospel, I read that the Lord Jesus, three times tempted of the devil in the wilderness, only opposes to each of these temptations a citation from the word of God, preceded by these solemn words, "It is written," Matt. iv. 1—10. Do you not think, madam, that in every circumstance of his life, but especially on this occasion, Jesus left us an example, that we should follow his steps? 1 Pet. ii. 21. And that we cannot find a more powerful weapon wherewith to overcome temptation, than this same, "It is written?" by means of which Jesus triumphed. But how will you find, like him, a special text, to employ against each special temptation, if you have not that exact knowledge of the Scriptures which personal study alone can give? Farther on, Jesus, when interrogated by a teacher of the law, as to what he must do to obtain eternal life, proposes to him, in his turn, this question, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" Luke x. 26. Suppose, madam, that it had been addressed to you, how would you have replied, if you knew not what is written; if you did not read? Connect together these two facts of the Gospel: "It is written." This is the weapon that Christ places in your hands. "What is written?" This is the question which Christ proposes to you; and yet you ought not to read!

Let us proceed. Christ said to the Jews: "Ye

search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me that ye might have life!" John v. 39. Christ here appeals to the Bible, as to a book which was read by every one; he approves of those who read it; and only blames the Jews because they had not there learned to recognise him.*

Do you know, madam, what is, according to the Saviour, the foundation of all religious instruction, and a foundation which suffices of itself alone? It is this: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them," Luke xvi. 29. It is Abraham who replies in these terms to the rich man in the parable. The rich man proposes a new means of warning his brethren, by a mission sent from the dead. It is useless, replies Abraham: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Can you imagine the Abbé thus summing up, in one single declaration, the whole teaching of religion: "They have Moses and the prophets;" or, still better, they

* An interpretation has here been followed, which differs from the generality of received versions, but which is allowed by the original, and which is more in unison with our Saviour's argument. If the common version be preferred, it would furnish Mr. Mercier with a still stronger argument, a positive command to read the Scriptures.

have the Gospel and the Epistles ; “ let them hear them ? ”

And whence came the errors of the Sadduces ? “ Ye do err,” said our Lord, “ not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God,” Matt. xxii. 29. Thus, madam, if the reading of the Scriptures engenders heresies, according to the Abbé ; it is, on the contrary, from not knowing them that we fall into error, according to Christ. Can we doubt that He would himself have placed them in your hands, had you been able to consult him personally ? Let us proceed to the Acts of the Apostles, and to their Epistles.

The superscription of the Epistles says every thing by itself alone. The first is addressed “ To all that be in Rome, beloved of God ; ” the second, “ Unto the church of God which is at Corinth ; ” another, “ To all the saints which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.” Assuredly, the Epistles must have been read to all those to whom they were written ; and that was, as you have just seen, to the entire churches, to all the saints ; that is, to all the Christians, and not to the pastors only. But this does not suffice the apostles ; they insist again, at the conclusion of some of their letters, that they should be read of all : “ And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans ; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea,” Col. iv. 16. “ I charge you by

the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren," 1 Thess. v. 27.

In the seventeenth chapter of the Acts we find a passage to which I cannot conceive what the Abbé would urge in reply. St. Paul preaches at Berea. The Bereans are desirous to know whether the doctrine which he announces is true. What did they do? They "searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so," Acts xvii. 11. You imagine, perhaps, that it was only the teachers who did this? No, madam, it was the whole Jewish population of Berea, and women among the number, (ver. 12.) Does not the Holy Spirit blame them for this? No, madam, the Holy Spirit commends them for it, and calls them "more noble than those in Thessalonica." But was not their faith in peril? Again, no. "Many of them believed;" and "they received the word with all readiness of mind." Allow me to ask you a question on this point. Had you been then at Berea, with the Abbé's principles, what would you have done? You would have feared to be wanting in humility, and to expose your soul by examining the Bible yourself. You would have had recourse to your "natural directors," that is to say, doubtless, to the chiefs of the Jewish church at Berea; or, for still greater security, to those of the church at Jerusalem; and, by an inevitable consequence, you would have rejected

St. Paul, you would have deprived yourself of the grace of God. What, madam ! the Jews did well to search the Scriptures, to know whether they confirmed the doctrine of St. Paul ; and we ought not to examine them, to know whether they say, in effect, what the church makes them to say !

But what do I say—the church ? Should you have an apostle, an angel from heaven, to guide you, you would still be bound to ascertain for yourself whether he taught nothing but what is written. “ Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed,” Gal. i. 8, 9. Yes, madam, if St. Paul rose from the dead, and preached before you, you ought not to say, “ He is one of Christ’s apostles, he cannot mislead me ;” and if an angel descended upon earth to instruct you, you ought not to say, “ This is an angel from heaven ; he cannot seduce me.” No ; “ for Satan himself” may be “ transformed into an angel of light ;” and “ his ministers as the ministers of righteousness,” saith the Holy Spirit, 2 Cor. xi. 14, 15. But you ought to examine whether the things which this apostle, this angel, may tell you, are conformable with the gospel you have received.

And how can you judge, if you have not read this gospel? Thus, far from obliging us to seek in a human tribunal an infallible light to fix the meaning of his word, God wills, on the contrary, that we should seek in this word an infallible light, by which to judge of the teaching of an apostle, of an angel, how much more those of a priest, of a bishop, of a pope, of a council!

We have the same doctrine expressed, in other terms, in St. John: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God," 1 John iv. 1, 2. You must, with every other believer, try the spirits of the teachers before you believe them; and you must try them by their doctrine. But how can you do so, otherwise than by comparing it with the word of God yourself? If you lay the charge of this examination on others, you again fall into the danger from which it is designed to save you. Those whom you consult may deceive you, as well as those on whose account you consult them. There is danger with every man. When we shall have employed one man to try all the rest, he himself must be tried; and this cannot be done, but by the word of God.

Shall it then be said, that you are thus reduced, as a last resource, to your own private opinion?

This would be pure sophistry. You do not consult your own spirit, like the Rationalists, as a flambeau which will enlighten you; but you consult the word of God with your spirit, as with an eye without which you can see nothing. You must always come to this: and the Abbé, who wishes you to consult the church, probably wishes you to consult it with your mind. All that we can do is, to pray God to preserve us from error; and if we ask him with sincerity, he has promised to hear us.*

After evidence so clear, it would be superfluous to multiply quotations. I shall confine myself to pointing out a few more passages, without enlarging upon them: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope," Rom. xv. 4.

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts," 2 Pet. i. 19. St. Peter approves of those Christians who meditate upon the writings of the prophets, in spite of the obscurity by which they are still, in a measure, veiled: will he not, also, approve of them, when they read the clearer parts of the Scriptures, and especially the New Testament?

* Psa. xxv. 8; xxxii. 8, etc.

In the beginning of his Revelation, St. John declares, that blessed is he that readeth: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein; for the time is at hand," Rev. i. 3. Every one, however, will confess that this book is the most difficult in the whole Bible. Give heed to these words, madam: "Blessed is he that readeth!" Ah, when the Abbé Favien says, "Do not read;" and when the Spirit of God says, "Blessed is he that readeth," can you hesitate?

I conclude by a passage from St. Paul, which explains the reason why he who readeth is blessed. "But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works," 2 Tim. iii. 14—17. These words, madam, need no commentary; let them crown your determination. Is it not your desire to be "perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works?" Well, the Holy Spirit points out the way, for you, and even for your children; it is the "knowledge

of the Holy Scriptures ; which are able to make you wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Take them, therefore, and read.

LETTER XIV.

MR. MERCIER TO LUCILLA.

Continuation of the Third Proof—The Bible interpreted by the Holy Spirit.

You are told, that if you read the Scriptures yourself, there is great danger of your not understanding them—a book, obscure from its antiquity ; obscure from the depth of the subjects on which it treats ; obscure from the fact alone, that it comes from God.

Be easy, madam : God who commands you to read the Bible, will take care that you lose nothing by obeying him. But now that I am about to show you the means by which he has provided against this—shall I confess ?—I fear that you will find it too wonderful to be believed. Listen here, I beseech you, not to your own opinions, not to the maxims of an unbelieving world—Christian as it calls itself—but to the word of God ; and when God speaks, when God promises, doubt not. This is the true faith, and this is also true humility.

That we require a guide in the study of the

Scriptures I willingly grant; but what is the guide that we require? In order to know this, it is important that we should know what is meant by the obscurity of the Bible.

Is the style in which it is written obscure? as the Abbé would lead us to imagine. No, madam, quite the contrary. Notwithstanding the depth of the subjects on which it treats, the style in which it is written is exceedingly clear; it is the most popular of books. It has evidently been composed with a reference to the simple and lowly, and whoever wishes to learn how to speak of the things of God in language intelligible to every one, cannot take a better model. Not that it does not contain passages difficult to be understood, even after all the learned explanations which have been given of them; but all that is necessary for salvation is most clearly made known.

The fathers, whom the Abbé quotes with so much confidence, have expressly acknowledged this characteristic of the Bible;* but what is still more decisive is, that it lays claim to it itself. According to its own account, it is a lamp unto

* St. Irenæus, disputing against heretics, who maintained that there was another God and Creator besides the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who brought forward obscure expositions of certain parables, tells them, "All prophetic and evangelical Scripture may be understood openly, and without ambiguity, by every man;" and shows them, "that they should be contented with the testimony of God, which is clearly set

our feet, and a light unto our path; it giveth wisdom to the simple; it enlightens the eyes; and if "secret things belong unto the Lord our God, those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children." If the gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world (Satan) hath blinded their minds, Psa. cxix. 105; xix. 7, 8; Deut. xxix. 29; 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

Whence, then, arises the obscurity which is found in the Bible, if it is so clear in itself? The last passage that I have quoted explains it to us. This obscurity comes from the darkness which sin has shed over our understanding. Man, before the Bible, is like a blind man before the sun. The sun is light itself; nevertheless the blind man cannot see it. The Bible also is full of clearness; "but the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them," 1 Cor. ii. 14. He may, indeed, have an historical knowledge of them; but of that

forth." St. Chrysostom, in his third Homily on the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, thus expresses himself: "Every thing in the Holy Scriptures is clear and straightforward; all things necessary are clear." And in his first Homily on St. John, he says, "There is no obscurity in this Gospel; it is clearer than the sun's rays." St. Augustine, after having enumerated the books of Scripture, says, "That among the things which are clearly taught in them, are found all those which concern faith and practice."—Pictet., Théol. Chr., p. 119.

spiritual and salutary intelligence which giveth life to the soul he is utterly destitute.

And how shall he obtain it? In order that the blind man may see, it will be of no avail to alter the sun; the closed eyes must be opened. The eyes of our mind must also be opened, madam, in order that the Bible, which we find obscure, may become clear to us. It is from our hearts, and not from the Bible, that the veil must be removed. Thus teaches the apostle Paul, when, speaking of the Jews, he says, "Even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart; nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away," 2 Cor. iii. 15, 16. It was not sufficient for Christ's disciples, that their Master should explain to them the Scriptures; it was also necessary that he should "open their understandings, that they might understand them," Luke xxiv. 45. Neither was it sufficient for Lydia to hear the preaching of St. Paul; it was necessary that her heart should be opened, to attend unto the things which he said, Acts xvi. 14. Here, then, is the difficulty, madam; and the guide that we require in reading the Scriptures, is one who can not only explain them to us, but who, above all, can open our hearts to receive them.

Where shall we find this guide? In the visible tribunal to which they would fain subject you? Admitting that this tribunal is what the Abbé

believes it to be; and that it can explain the Scriptures without danger of error; it is a valuable help, certainly; yet it is not that of which you have the most urgent need. It only removes the least of your difficulties; the chief obstacle still subsists in all its force. It is as though a surgeon, called to undertake the cure of a blind man, were to fix all his attention on some apparatus for increasing the intensity of the sun's rays; and were to do nothing for the restoration of his sight. In vain the Bible is explained, commented upon, interpreted; so long as the heart remains closed, the Bible will remain so too. Now, does the Abbé's visible tribunal engage to open your heart? The bishop of Rome, the fathers of a council, even of a general council—what do I say? even the angels of heaven—do they engage to give, or to take from you, a single feeling, a single thought? No, madam, and you might perish for lack of knowledge at the feet of an infallible tribunal, which, all infallible as it is, is not the master of your heart.

But there is another guide who offers to lead you: it is God himself; it is the Holy Spirit. It is he who, after having acted upon the spirits of the prophets and apostles, to the end that they might write the Holy Scriptures, is ready to act upon your spirit also, that you may receive them.

Let us hasten to correct a mistake which is too prevalent. By the Holy Spirit, promised to

every Christian, I do not mean inspiration. Inspiration is one thing, the gift of the Holy Ghost is another. Inspiration, the design of which is to make man the infallible depository of Divine revelation, and which is generally attested by miraculous powers, has been the portion of a very limited number of individuals, whom God has chosen to proclaim his word, and especially to write it; and we have every reason to believe that it was discontinued about the time that the canon of the New Testament was brought to a close. It is not, therefore, of inspiration that I speak. Let me beg you to bear this in mind, madam, because those who apply to themselves the promise of the Holy Spirit are generally accused of pretending to inspiration. We hold the prophets and apostles alone to have been inspired; but the gift of the Holy Ghost, which is necessary in order to a reception of the inspired Scriptures to salvation, is promised to us as well as to those men of God; and it was as necessary to them as it is to us, inspired as they were. Christ even taught them to estimate this general gift more highly than the special privilege: hence this beautiful passage: "In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven," Luke x. 20. Such, madam, is the goodness of God. In grace, as in nature, his most precious gifts are the most common.

But this gift of the Holy Spirit, how shall I describe it to you? The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, descending into the heart of man. The Holy Spirit is God in man: it is the crowning of the work of salvation; and beyond this nothing can be conceived. A divine of the church has remarked, "The Old Testament already shows us God the Father, or God for us. The Gospels go still farther, and show us God the Son, or God with us. The Acts and the Epistles complete the plan, and show us God the Holy Ghost, or God in us." How glorious, madam!

This is the grand promise, the distinctive privilege of the New Testament, Gal. iii. 14. Some believers under the Old Testament dispensation were allowed to contemplate the Son of God, on those solemn occasions when he appeared to them under a visible form. "Abraham rejoiced to see his day: and he saw it, and was glad," John viii. 56. But the full gift of the Holy Ghost was reserved for "the latter times;" even when the Son of God was "manifest in the flesh." The Holy Spirit, such as he has since been vouchsafed to the Christian church, was not yet come. This is confirmed by the following admirable passage in St. John's Gospel: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said out of his belly shall flow

rivers of living water. But he spake this of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive : for the Holy Ghost was not yet,* because that Jesus was not yet glorified," John vii. 37—39.

At length, the day of Pentecost arrives, and the kingdom of heaven is founded upon earth. The day of Pentecost is the grand day of the new covenant, and the point of demarcation between the Old and New Testaments. There begins the full light of faith ; there, the free preaching of the gospel ; there, newness of life ; there, the church of Christ. From this day " the least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than John the Baptist," who was, nevertheless, the greatest among the prophets, Matt. xi. 11. For the Spirit, which was given on that day, fulfils all in all : as it is He who inspires the apostles, and makes them speak many languages which they had never learned ; it is He who causes their doctrine to penetrate into the hearts of those that hear ; He who enlightens the faithful soul, who consoles it, who teaches it how to pray, who produces every good disposition ; in short, who

* We read in most versions " for the Holy Ghost was not yet *given* ;" but this last word is not found in the original. Not that the Holy Ghost had been inactive during Christ's sojourn upon earth, and even under the Old Testament dispensation ; but he began to act in a manner altogether new on the day of Pentecost. Before he had operated in the world ; then he gave himself to the church.

prepares it to understand and receive the things of the Bible.

“What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God,” 1 Cor. ii. 11, 12. Do you perceive, madam, the force of this argument, at once so simple and so profound? As the spirit of a man alone knoweth what is in that man, so the Spirit of God alone knoweth what is in God. If you find any obscurity in this letter, to whom could you more fitly apply than to me, by whom it is written? If you find any in the Bible, you must, by parity of reason, address yourself to the Spirit of God, by whom it is dictated. He being the author of this Book, is also its most sure interpreter.

Whoever has this Spirit, madam, is taught of God himself, according to this prophecy of Isaiah: “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord,” Isa. liv. 13; and according to the testimony which St. John bears to every true believer: “The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you,” 1 John ii. 27. Whoever has this Spirit is as highly favoured as if the Lord Jesus Christ were near him, under a visible form, and he could interrogate and hear

him, as men could in Judea eighteen centuries ago. What do I say? He is more highly favoured still. Yes, madam, he is more so. Let us not fear to affirm this; for the Lord himself has declared it. Jesus has just announced to his disciples that he is about to leave them; then, seeing their sorrow, he adds these wonderful words: "Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away—" And why, madam? Is it because the bishop of Rome will hereafter supply his place upon earth? Is it he—is it the councils—is it the visible tribunal, whose presence is better for man, than that of Christ? Finish the Saviour's answer: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you," John xvi. 6, 7; xiv. 26.

O madam! this Guide, whose presence would be more precious to you than even intercourse with the Saviour himself; this Spirit of God, may it indeed be yours? This is the whole question. For if you have it not, nothing in the world can supply its place. In vain they say that this Spirit instructs others for you. Once more, madam; should another be instructed for you, infallibly instructed, he might set the truth before you, I allow; but could he cause it to penetrate into your heart? If he is enlightened for you, will he,

also, be convinced for you? touched for you? consoled for you? justified for you? saved for you? Leave, then, these blind guides, who dare to place themselves between your soul and God. Take, oh take the true Guide, which Christ announces, and which God promises to you. Yes, madam, He is promised to you, for he is promised to all; and this grace, so glorious, that we hardly dare believe it possible even for the greatest saints, is assured to the least disciple of Christ.

In effect, open the New Testament at the second chapter of the Acts, at the history of the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit has just descended on the apostles; the astonished multitude have seen its wonderful signs; and the believers inquire, as you inquire to-day, whether every disciple of Christ may pretend to any part in a grace so new, and so prodigious. What must they have felt, madam, when they heard the following words uttered by St. Peter: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost! For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call," Acts ii. 38, 39. Does not this precisely reply to the question which fills your heart? and does it not reply in terms clear as the day? Does it not expressly say, that this gift is not for the apostles only, but for every

believer? for each of us, for our children, for all that are afar off, for as many as the Lord our God shall call? Can any thing be more comprehensive? Do you still require further proofs? you will find them every where. It is to all the believers in Corinth that St. Paul writes, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" 1 Cor. iii. 16. It is to all the Christians at Ephesus that he elsewhere writes, "After that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise," Eph. i. 13; and again, "Be filled with the Spirit," Eph. v. 18. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his," Rom. viii. 9. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost," 1 Cor. xii. 3.

What a promise, madam! The day in which you receive it in your heart, will be your pentecost, and a new life will begin for your soul. Then your faith will become living, dead as it was before. Then your eyes will be opened, your heart enlarged, your soul "created" anew, according to the expression of the Holy Ghost, Eph. ii. 10. Then, having the Holy Spirit for your Guide, you will have God for your Father, and Jesus Christ for your Brother; for it is written, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God," Rom. viii. 14. And what must be done to obtain this spirit? Only to ask. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock,

and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Luke xi. 9—13.

Here, then, is the true means by which God has provided for the explanation of his word. "Who shall instruct me in the things of God, but God himself?" says a Christian poet. With the Bible in your hands, and with the Holy Spirit in your heart, should you be alone in the desert, you would still have all that is necessary for the knowledge of God, and for the salvation of your soul. They will tell you, that thus to confide in the Holy Spirit, is to believe yourself inspired? No; it is simply to believe that God deigns to enlighten your mind, and to touch your heart. They will tell you that it is to pretend to infallibility? No; you will not be sheltered from every error, but rely upon God to give you the degree of light which is indispensable. They will tell you, that it is presumptuous thus to confide in yourself? No; unless a child who will listen to his father alone, may be accused of presumption,

because, in order to hear him, he uses his own understanding, and his own ears. They will tell you, that it is to despise all counsel? No; you will hearken to counsel, but you will examine it by the word of God; and you will not become "the servant of men." Let them tell you what they will, madam, but give glory to God. Rest humbly and stedfastly on his promises; and if you meet with some one who pretends to despoil you of the glorious privileges of the children of God, under the pretext that he is Christ's vicar, reply with Tertullian,* that "Christ has no other vicar than the Holy Ghost."

Of all the Abbé's arguments, the most specious is that which is furnished by the Ethiopian, who says to Philip, "How can I understand, except some man should guide me?" The Abbé makes a clever use of this reply; but a very simple reflection overturns all his reasoning: it is, that the man whom he cites is no authority. It is not an infallible apostle who here speaks. It is an humble and pious disciple, doubtless, but one upon whom the light is only beginning to dawn: and what we ought especially to observe is, that as yet he knows not the Holy Spirit. Because he is humble, he feels that he requires a counsellor; and because he knows not the Holy Spirit, he imagines, perhaps, that he needs a man to guide him. But follow him when the gospel has

* In a passage already quoted.

been fully explained to him, and after he has been baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. "The Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip," whose directions were, doubtless, no longer necessary to his disciple. What then does this new convert? He has just lost the guide without whom he had imagined a few hours before that he could understand nothing; will he think himself utterly abandoned, and without resource? No, madam; "he went on his way rejoicing," Acts viii. 30—39. Because the same Spirit which caught away Philip, but which had not caught away his Bible, explained it to him, instead of Philip, and better still than Philip could have done.

This history, properly understood, is calculated, on the contrary, to encourage you to read the word of God. "Here is a man who was enlightened while reading the Holy Scriptures. He held an important office, and possessed great riches; and, nevertheless, he applied himself to this study, even when travelling; what, then, would he not do when at rest in his house? But there is much ground for admiration, in the means which God employed in order to his conversion. He had not seen Jesus; no miracle had been performed in his presence; how then was this sudden change wrought in him? and whence is it that he was so disposed to receive what Philip said? Because his soul was engrossed by

the things of God; because he was attentive to the Scriptures, and was employed in reading them. So advantageous and useful is it to read the Holy Scriptures." Do you know who said this? St. Chrysostom. The conclusion which he draws from this recital is, in my opinion, quite equal to the opposite conclusion which is drawn from it by the Abbé Favien.

My task is ended, madam; and you now know the reasons which have induced me to read the Bible. Will they not, also, induce you to do the same? What wait you for? Use a right which God has given you; obey a command written by his hand. Then your faith, resting "not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God," will be firm as the rock of ages on which it is founded.

LETTER XV.

LUCILLA TO MR. MERCIER.

How, sir, can I be sufficiently grateful for the trouble you have taken in replying to me! If I were obliged to judge between the Abbé and you, by the kindness which you have each shown in defending your cause, I should indeed be embarrassed. But it is not this, I feel, which ought to determine me. I ought to weigh your reasons. Those of the Abbé had nearly convinced me;

but you have greatly shaken this feeling. Perhaps, I am wrong to confess this to you. Ought I not rather to tell Mr. Favien, in order that he may endeavour to strengthen me ?

This worthy Abbé, how can I believe him in error ? How can I abandon him who has shown me the way of salvation, and persuaded me of the truth of the Christian religion ? I fear I know not what seduction. Yes, sir, I confess I fear that you will entice me ; that you will turn me aside from the Catholic church. You must be a Protestant yourself, though this word is not found in your letters. One would think that you studiously avoided it.

It would be difficult for me to describe the feelings to which your letters have given rise. They delighted and grieved me by turns. They gave me glimpses of a new existence ; and the moment after they again plunged me into distressing uncertainty. I find there, as you formerly found in the gospel, many things which are admirable, with others which I know not how to believe. I require new explanations, and I hesitate to ask them. Am I acting right ? Am I doing wrong ? I know not ; I fear to inquire ; and yet I cannot remain in my present state.

However this may be, since I have begun, I must finish. My uncertainty must be brought to an end ; and while I consider it, in some sort, a point of conscience to write to you, I also

feel, as it were, constrained to do so. God seeth my heart. He knows that it was my anxious desire after salvation that prompted me to enter upon this path, which I know not how to abandon.

I have confessed, sir, that your reasons appear to me the stronger of the two. The passages which you quote from the Scriptures have especially made a deep impression upon my mind. I conceive that neither my fallible reason, nor a necessarily uncertain tradition, can afford solid ground for my salvation. Only God and his word can do this. Scriptural proofs must constitute the essential point. Those which are alleged by the Abbé had appeared to me sufficient; but I now perceive that, as you say, I completed the meaning, and added to these texts something which does not exist in them; at least, which is not evident.

Nevertheless, I also see objections against your views, so important, so decisive, that they cause me still to lean to the other side. Is it from a spirit of contradiction? If it be, I am ill-acquainted with my own heart; for I believe that I seek truth alone. These objections have been touched upon by the Abbé at the close of his letter. It is for this reason, perhaps, that you have not thought necessary to allude to them: besides, you had enough to do to reply to his three proofs. It was, nevertheless, these accessory considerations which struck me the most in all that he has

written ; especially as I have, more than once, heard them adduced by priests ; and really I can hardly conceive what could be urged in reply.

They are drawn from the experience of the dissenting churches. Having no judge to decide in doubtful cases of controversy, the members of these churches must find themselves in continual perplexity. You say, indeed, that they have the Holy Spirit ; but as the Holy Spirit is neither seen nor heard, it is easy to say that he has been received, and difficult to furnish proof. " This being the case," say these priests, (and I heard one speaking on the subject a few days ago,) " they fall, with their doctrine of individual inspiration, into all the inconveniences of the system of the Rationalists. How, in effect, can they thus have a centre of authority ? and if two persons, who both imagine that they have the Holy Spirit, do not see the same thing in the Bible, who shall decide between them ? And how can the faithful have any certainty of having found the true meaning of the Bible, when it may be, and in fact is, so diversely understood ? And again, how can there be that unity in the church which Jesus Christ so evidently desired, when every individual forms his own religious opinions ? Do we not see in France, and elsewhere, dissenting sects divided and subdivided without end ? They agree, it is said, on fundamental points ; but what right have they to choose among the subjects of revela-

tion ? And who will be charged to draw up the list of fundamental points ? And lastly, what is the use of the ministry of pastors, if we are not obliged to submit to their decisions ? If the pastor can do nothing but what every one else could do as well as himself, let him descend from his pulpit, place a Bible there, and every thing will be said."

Such was the discourse of this priest. You see it is little else than a development of what the Abbé Favien said in conclusion. Perhaps you can throw some light on the subject ; this, however, appears to me very difficult. The variations in the dissenting churches seem to me a much greater evil than even blind submission. Is, then, the danger of the present day that of believing too much ? Is it not rather that of being wanting in faith ?

Ah ! sir, whatever you may say, I should be much more tranquil if Christ were upon earth, and I could go and consult him. This would, doubtless, be better than the pope and his councils ; but I am not quite convinced that it would not also be better for me, at least, than the Holy Spirit. This doctrine of the Holy Spirit perplexes me ; I am among those who would fear it as a sort of inspiration.

I shall not beg you to excuse all the trouble I give you. This would not accord with the high opinion I have formed of your Christian kindness.

LETTER XVI.

MR. MERCIER TO LUCILLA.

Reply to some Objections.

I HAVE received the last letter which you have done me the honour of writing to me. I fancy that I can perceive through all the agitation of your soul, symptoms of a dawning faith ; and, at all events, I see an ardent desire to know and to follow the truth. This suffices to re-assure me ; for it is written, " He that seeketh, findeth," Matt. vii. 8. But, be calm, madam, I entreat you ; you will attain the desired end the more surely, and the more promptly ; for it is also written, " Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him," Psa. xxxvii. 7.

My arguments strike you, but you are prevented from adopting my views by difficulties which are deemed inseparable from the doctrines which I support. That there are difficulties in the principle I have maintained, I agree ; but I say with the Abbé, " Difficulty is not doubt ;" and even an insoluble difficulty could not shake a well-established proposition. Apply this wise maxim to the subject of our correspondence, and you will no longer be disturbed by the discourse which you have reported to me. Admitting that I cannot answer all the *hows* of this priest ; God has permitted, has prescribed the reading of the Bible

to all. This is enough to enable you to do it in peace.

However, madam, I think that I can diminish the doubts which pre-occupy you. They will only be completely dissipated when you have received the light of the Holy Spirit. Of this light you are destitute, as is also the priest of whom you speak ; and hence arise all these questions. But I am now about to show you that the difficulties of which he complains are less than he imagines. I do not intend to enter so much into detail, as when I was discussing the Abbé's proofs. If my former replies were solid—and I believe them such—a few words will suffice for each of the minor points on which you now consult me.

And especially remember, madam, that your salvation, your personal salvation, is concerned in this matter. "What must I do to be saved?" was the question of the Philippian jailor, Acts xvi. 30 ; and it is what you, also, should propose. This question is simple and precise ; let us not confound it with that of the church, which is embarrassed and complicated. Do not neglect this precaution ; you cannot imagine how much it will facilitate your task. The believer exists before the church, as the trees are before the forest ; and Adam, for instance, if he believed the promise of grace, was saved by faith before there was a church in the world. The word of God makes believers ; and believers make the church.

Begin, then, by the question of salvation; that of the church will follow.

Moreover, madam, you will do well to bear the following reflection continually in mind during the present discussion. They tell you, that without an infallible tribunal you will meet with certain difficulties. This is all very well; but have they themselves this infallible tribunal? The important point, evidently, is not to have a tribunal reputed infallible; it is to have one which is such in reality; for what you require, is not to believe yourself saved, but to be saved in reality. A tribunal reputed infallible, and which is not such, might be very convenient for the souls which blindly trust in it; but it would be very dangerous. It might give them security, but it would not place them in safety; and such security is only the bliss of sleeping on the edge of a precipice. The authority which would be conceded to such a tribunal might be exercised in favour of heresy; the assurance it would give to the faithful might be illusive; the unity which it would produce in the church might be that of error; and the pastoral ministry that it would sanction might be a ministry of ignorance or of seduction. This observation is so simple, that it may appear superfluous; nevertheless it is not so. The minds of men are easily mistaken in cases of this kind; and they often reason as if the Abbé's visible tribunal did indeed possess the infallibility to which it lays

claim. If I believed that it did, I would immediately range myself on its side ; but I believe I have shown you that it has not. Let us now proceed to your difficulties.

They ask, in the first place, how, without a visible tribunal, we can have an authority which judges without appeal in cases of controversy ? It cannot be denied, that the churches which do not believe in a visible tribunal still have all the authority requisite for the government of their affairs, and for the preservation of their internal order. Thus, not to mention the churches of England, of Scotland, of Germany, the Reformed church of France virtually possesses, and really possessed, in more happy times, a synodal government, which maintained through the length and breadth of the land one common confession of faith, and one common discipline, to whose decisions every one was obliged to submit, under pain of expulsion from the church. But this government would not satisfy you, madam ; for, however respectable it might be, it is not absolutely sheltered from error. You wish for an authority which puts all controversies at rest by sovereign and infallible decisions. For want of this, say they, we can never demonstrate that the truth is with us. Had we really the Holy Spirit, this Spirit could not serve us as a proof in the eyes of others.

I grant this, although with certain restrictions.

We are not mystics. The things which the Holy Spirit teaches us, are not altogether of an invisible nature. With the Bible in our hands, we can justify our belief by clear and positive testimony ; and I think we can convince of its truth all who, like us, receive the Bible as the word of God. But I grant, that if any one contradicts it, we cannot close his mouth by calling forth the decision of a sovereign and infallible authority.

But this, madam, is not indispensable. For, observe, what I want is, to have the truth, not to prove that I have it. If I have it, God will assuredly know. "The Lord knoweth them that are his," 2 Tim. ii. 19. This is the all-important point, since it is God who will judge us, not man. "But, with me," said St. Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, "it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment : yea, I judge not mine own self.—He that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts : and then shall every man have praise of God," 1 Cor. iv. 3—5. Let men believe me damned, what do I lose by it, if I am saved ? Let men canonize me, what do I gain, if I am consigned to hell ?

This objection arises from a general and capital error. Man, inclined to walk by sight, and impatient in his judgments would anticipate the

sentence of God. Hence he transfers to earth and to time a judgment which is reserved for heaven and for eternity; he takes it from the Creator, to give it to the creature. Always bear in mind, that the salvation of your soul must be settled between God and you, not between you and your fellow men. John Huss, burned by the council of Constance, may be calm in spite of the anathemas of a whole assembly, if he possesses an inward and well-grounded assurance that he belongs to Christ. And we, madam, provided we are in the truth, and can "assure our hearts before God," 1 John iii. 19, have no need of any human authority to furnish us with the means of proving it to the rest of the world.

But, at least, continues your priest, if you have no absolute need of proving to others that you have the truth, you require to know it with certainty yourself; and you cannot do this without an infallible tribunal.

And why not, I pray? Cannot the Spirit of God give me an inward assurance "that this is the true grace of God wherein I stand?" 1 Peter v. 12. The best proof that he *can*, is that he *does*; he affirms this himself in many parts of Scripture. St. John writes in his general epistle, "Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us," 1 John iii. 24. Again he writes, "Hereby know we that we dwell in him and he in us, because he hath given us

of his Spirit," 1 John iv. 13. St. Paul writes to the Romans, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God," Rom. viii. 15, 16. When God himself deigns to assure our hearts that we belong to him, what need have we that his testimony should be guaranteed to us by that of man? Surely, when the poor sinful woman heard the Saviour say, "Go in peace; thy sins are forgiven thee," she required nothing more; and if the whole sanhedrim had met her on that occasion, they would have taken nothing from her by denying her forgiveness, nor added anything by confirming it. Well, madam, with the Holy Spirit, you have as much, you have more than this poor woman had. I have already pointed out this wonderful passage; but I delight in showing it to you again: "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you," John xvi. 7.

And where have they learned that we can have no peace of mind until the sentence of grace has sounded in our outward ears? The Lord, in order to speak to our hearts, has a voice which may be heard without the help of organs, and which silently penetrates to the inmost recesses of the soul. Behold a man who has been a prey

to the deepest anguish, and who has cried at the sight of his sins, "How shall I appear before my Judge?" Behold him when he has found the peace of God, and when he joyfully repeats this blessed testimony of one of the apostles, "I know in whom I have believed." What has taken place in this man? You have seen nothing, you have heard nothing. The Holy Ghost has spoken to him, madam; and while a blinded priest refuses to believe in a pardon unheard by his outward ears, the faithful soul secretly appeals to God himself: he says, "My witness is in heaven;" and you will as easily persuade him that it is noon at midnight, as you will lead him to doubt that God is his Father, Christ is his Saviour, and the Holy Spirit his Guide. This is the true assurance; and far from saying, that with the Holy Ghost, without a visible tribunal, one cannot be sure of being received in grace, it must, on the contrary, be confessed that the Holy Ghost alone can give us well-grounded peace.

Observe, madam, that the assurance of which I here speak, is the assurance of salvation, not an assurance of infallibility. I do not state, that the soul of the believer will be so enlightened on every point of doctrine, that it cannot fall into error on any question. I only say, that it will be so enlightened on the fundamentals of the faith, that it cannot be mistaken therein. For there are fundamental points which are essential to salvation;

and there are other points of which, however important they may be in themselves, (for nothing is indifferent in the word of God,) we may, nevertheless, remain ignorant without causing the loss of our souls. You must not take offence at this distinction. Every one is obliged to make it: and the Abbé Favien, for instance, regards both Fenelon and Bossuet as true Christians, though they were not entirely agreed between themselves. How is this, unless it be that he considers the points on which they were united as of more importance than those on which they were divided? Scripture itself has given us the example of this; it suffices to study it with some attention to discover, not only that there are fundamental points, but also to discern what they are; and to draw up the list required by the author of your objections.* If it be true, that

* The doctrine of fundamental points is established by St. Paul, 1 Cor. iii. 10—15; for it follows from this passage that we cannot be ignorant of “the foundation which is Jesus Christ,” without being lost; but that there are other points on which one may err, and nevertheless “be saved, yet so as by fire.”

“But who will undertake to draw up the list of fundamental points?” This is a favourite question among the controversialists of the Roman Catholic church. To this two answers may be given.

In the first place, this task would not be so difficult as they appear to imagine. The work is already performed in the Bible; and we have only to distinguish what it has distinguished. Thus, when St. Paul, interrogated by the jailor of Philippi as

Bossuet asked Claude whether a poor old woman might be in the right when opposed to a whole council, and that Claude was embarrassed at this

to what he must do to be saved, replies, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, Acts xvi. 31;" there is evidently a reference to a fundamental point; and when the same St. Paul, writing to men who were believers, and converted, says, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you," Phil. iii. 15; he evidently alludes to points which are not fundamental. One might be aided in this research by taking the most accredited creeds of the different Christian communions; for instance, that of the council of Nice, that of the council of Trent, that of the reformed church of France, that of the church of England, that of the Lutheran church; selecting from them those articles which are common to all.

But this task, to go on to my second reflection, would not be absolutely necessary. It is so for those who wish to instruct others; but it is not so when there is a reference only to our personal salvation. For there may be, and doubtless there are, persons who know *all that is necessary* to salvation, without being able exactly to explain *what are the necessary articles*. It is one thing to believe; it is another to be able to write a formula of one's belief. If a mother gives a child a sufficient quantity of wholesome food, without teaching it to analyze the different substances of which it is composed, or to appreciate the greater or less need it may have of each of them, will the child be less nourished? The great point is, that *the mother* should not be mistaken. It also suffices for us, in a strict sense, that God should be perfectly aware of what are fundamental points, and of what are not. Even should we not be capable of discerning this ourselves, it is enough that God is, and that he has promised not to leave us ignorant of what is necessary to our salvation and he promises this in more than a hundred passages.

question, it was a want of faith on his part; he should boldly have replied, "Yes." For it may be that this poor old woman had the Spirit of God, and that this assembly of bishops had it not. Else what signifies this prayer of our Saviour, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight," Matt. xi. 25, 26. The pious widow of Sarepta was in the right, against all the priests, and almost all the prophets, of her time, 1 Kings xvii., connected with 1 Kings xix. Rahab was in the right against all the people of Jericho, its king, and its priests. Lydia was in the right against all the magistrates of Philippi; and the thief who was crucified beside our Saviour was in the right against the whole sanhedrim, (the council of the Jewish church.) Yes, madam, and this poor old woman, despised by the sage Bossuet, may be so strengthened by the word of God, that she may say with St. Paul, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," Rom. viii. 38, 39. O madam, when will this language be yours?

I now come to your third difficulty, madam,

which, if I may judge by experience, is the most important of them all, and that on which the priest must have laid the greatest stress. "How can there be unity in the church without a visible tribunal?"

This point, however, is not so important as it is represented; that which we have just considered is much more so. For truth is union with God; unity is union with men. Truth without unity would still save us; but unity in error would consign us to perdition. At the same time I am far from denying that unity is most desirable; and that it is strongly recommended by Scripture: but in what consists this unity which Christ enjoins upon his church?

There is an external and visible unity, and there is a unity which is internal and invisible. The former is that which exists between two men who belong to the same religious denomination, who follow the same pastors, who communicate at the same table. The second is that which exists between two men who have the same sentiments, the same mind, the same heart. One can conceive these two unities united, and this is indeed a lovely sight; but the one is often seen without the other. Two men may be externally and visibly united in the same communion, though one may have faith in his heart, and the other may not; so indeed that the one may walk in the road which leads to heaven, and the other in that

which leads to hell. This is an earthly and temporal union, which ends by eternal separation. Two other men may be inwardly and invisibly united, both having faith in their hearts, though they may belong to different communions : no matter, both are in the way to heaven. If they do not go hand in hand to heaven, they will join hands when they arrive there. Theirs is a brief separation, which ends in an eternal union. Of these two unities, madam, which is, in your opinion, that to which Christ attached the most importance? The second, without dispute. Surely there is more unity when both go to heaven under different names, than when, with the same name, one goes to heaven, the other to hell. Moreover, the primitive church itself had not the complete enjoyment of outward unity. Between the Christians who had left the synagogue, and those who had abandoned paganism, there was some diversity of opinion and practice ; and the apostles endeavoured less to effect its dissipation, than to maintain " the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," Eph. iv. 3—6.

With our principles, madam, what then is the kind of unity in which we may be wanting? It is external unity. I confess, if every one reads the Holy Scriptures, with prayer for the aid of the Holy Spirit, and without having recourse to a visible tribunal, several distinct churches may be formed, according to the spirit of the age, the

genius of nations, the character of pastors. There may be a Lutheran church in Germany, an Episcopal church in England, a Presbyterian church in Scotland and France. But the inward unity of minds, far from being hindered by our plan, will be its necessary consequence; for the Holy Spirit is one. He has promised to all those who ask it, the aid of his light; and this light is one. He shows them the way of life, and this way is one. He inspires them with charity, and charity is one. He reveals to them "one God," the Father of all, "one Lord," the Saviour of all, and reveals himself to them as "one Spirit." Two souls who have passed through this school, and who have really profited by it, can only have, in the main, the same doctrine, the same hope, the same baptism, the same feelings, the same language. This is what a father of the church required: *In necessariis unitas*; that is to say, unity in essentials.

This unity will exist, madam, in spite of certain differences on points of secondary importance. If a Tahitian, converted to the Christian faith, by the instructions of a missionary belonging either to the English or Lutheran churches, came to visit me, I can assure you beforehand, that I should find myself one with him. We should find that, at a distance of two thousand leagues from each other, we had the same experience, acquired the same light, learned to invoke the same God, the

same Saviour, the same Spirit ; and when we shall have rejoiced together in the loving-kindness of Christ, when we shall have bowed the knee together before him, when we shall together have thanked him for giving us “one heart, and one mind ;” think you that I should grow cold towards my brother when I learned that he bore a different name from mine, and that he did not follow *with* me the Master whom he follows *like* me, and better than I do ?

And more : not only may this divergence on secondary points exist without disturbing the union of hearts, but it may in a manner foster it. It exercises toleration ; it humbles our pride ; it excites us to search the Scriptures with holy emulation ; it obliges us to cling more closely to the foundation which is common to all—“Christ and him crucified.” Wherefore, in expectation of the time when the Head of the church shall join his people into “one fold, under one shepherd,” we affirm that all men, who are really led by the Spirit, will be united in heart ; and that they will be so in proportion as they possess more piety and more charity. I add, that this unity is the best means of attaining the other ; and that it is by beginning to have one mind, that we shall end by forming one body.

Lastly, madam, it appears to you, or rather to the priest who has suggested your objections, that if every one may read the Bible, under the

direction of the Holy Ghost, the ministry of pastors becomes useless.

That pastors are not infallible, that they are not so necessary but that we may be saved without them, I agree ; but that does not prevent them from being useful, very useful : infallibility and usefulness are two very different things. You do not think yourself, madam, an infallible mother ; nor so indispensable to your children, that they would be deprived of every means of instruction, should they have the misfortune to lose you ; but do you thence conclude that your cares are useless to them ? There is no infallible teacher in any science : is it, therefore, useless that there should be masters and professors ? Is it also useless that there should be judges, magistrates, and princes, because they are not infallible in their decisions ?

A false idea is entertained of the pastoral ministry. Religious ministers are considered as a separate class of beings, surrounded by a sort of mysterious halo, and who serve as mediators between God and man ; but it is not in this light that they are described in Scripture. God has every where established a hierarchy, and has given authority to some over others. This order exists in the family, it exists in the state, it exists also in the church ; hence arises the pastoral ministry. Pastors are simply the guides of the churches.

Under the Old Testament, one tribe was

reserved for the service of the temple, and one family of this tribe for the immolation of the victims ; but as there no longer exists a temple in which only the Lord will be invoked, to the exclusion of every other place, neither is there any longer a priesthood. The veil of the temple is rent, and the Holy of holies is open to all the people. And Jeremiah thus expresses himself when predicting the gospel era : " They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord : for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord : for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more," Jer. xxxi. 34. St. Peter, in his turn, calls the Christian church a generation of priests : " Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people ; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light," 1 Peter ii. 9. What was formerly reserved for a privileged class, now belongs to all the people of God : preaching, the sacraments, the word which binds and looses, the discernment of doctrine ; all these gifts are accorded under the gospel, not to a few, but to all. If some have the mission of dispensing them, it is for the preservation of order, and as the delegates of all. The pastoral office is a function, not a privilege ; it is an administration, not a priesthood.

They tell you that the pastoral office, thus curtailed, answers no end whatever. And I say, on the contrary, how much good may be done by pastors who consider their task in this humble point of view! There is no fear that they will ever place themselves between the believer and his God ; or that he will ever be tempted to lay upon others his own responsibility before God. Far from usurping the place of Christ, the true pastor endeavours to retire, that his Master may alone be seen. The spirit which animates him is that of John the Baptist, who said to his disciples, while showing the Lord, " He must increase, but I must decrease," John iii. 30. Humble and affecting words, which ought to serve as a motto to every minister of the gospel! There is no reason why such a pastor should confine himself to reading the Bible ; (though, be assured, this reading which some seem to disdain, is a most honourable and interesting function in his eyes ;) he also explains the word of God ; he preaches it. The voice of man, his personal experience, the accent of conviction ; all these have so much power over the hearts of the people. What the book had not done alone, it will do when explained by a sinful man, who draws from this very infirmity, which he shares with his hearers, the advantage of being able to say to them, " I have obtained mercy ; I believe, and therefore have I spoken," 1 Tim. i. 16 ;

2 Cor. iv. 13. What a glorious sight, a sinner saved by grace, announcing the same grace to other sinners! And when they also see the servant of Christ governing the affairs of the church, administering the sacraments, instructing children and young persons, visiting the sick, comforting the afflicted; and all this from the same word of God, which reveals salvation to him and to his flock; who would dare to accuse his ministry of barrenness?

In constituting him a priest, a sort of necessary mediator between God and the sinner, far from increasing his usefulness, they diminish it; for, by rendering himself thus prominent, he throws Christ and the Holy Spirit into the shade: whereas, it is his duty and his mission to promote their undivided reign. Then he would exercise over the men whom ignorance has subjected to him, an oppressive domination. The true pastor leads by the word of God, men whom Christ has made free. He loves to remind them of these words of Christ: "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren," Matt. xxiii. 8; whence he draws this conclusion, with St. Cyril of Jerusalem: "You must not take my word for what I tell you, without having ascertained that my instructions are borne out by the Holy Scriptures." What faithfulness, what dignity is in this language! and how much confidence it

shows in those that hold it in the truth which they announce! Let them give us such pastors as these, and we will be subject to them, as God commands: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you," Heb. xiii. 17. But a man who interposes between the Lord and me—a man without whom I cannot have any intercourse with God—a man who receives the Holy Spirit in my place; I will have none of him. Jews may have said to Moses, "Speak thou with us, but let not God speak with us," Exod. xx. 19; but such is not the language of Christian faith. Speak, will we rather say; speak, Lord; thy servants hearken: thy sheep know thy voice!

These are my answers, madam, to the four difficulties you propose. Let believers have the Holy Spirit, and they will have no need of the authority which may be exercised by a visible judge of controversies; nor of the assurance that he may give; nor of the unity that he may produce; nor of the pastoral ministry that he may authorize. If they have not the Holy Spirit, what I have said is, of course, no longer applicable: left to an interpretation of their own, they leave Christianity, and fall into rationalism. Then, I agree, the faithful will have no true

authority, no true assurance, no true unity, nor any true pastoral ministry : but neither could they have them with the visible tribunal, even were it infallible. They would only have the appearance of them. Why ? because, being visible and external, this tribunal only possesses a visible and external action : whereas, the religion of Christ is addressed to the heart, and requires that God should be worshipped “in spirit and in truth ;” and hence a merely external influence can never serve its purpose. On the contrary, it falsifies and distorts that which it professes to explain. When the quarrel between Fenelon and Bossuet was decided at Rome, against the former, Fenelon might withdraw his book ; he might retract it ; he might burn it ; but think you that he could inwardly abandon his conviction, merely because it had been condemned at Rome ? He could, had he been convinced of error by the Holy Spirit ; because the Holy Spirit would, at the same time, have impressed his soul with a new view of the subject : but he could not with the visible tribunal of Rome, which has no dominion over the mind. So that this boasted infallible authority—this judge of controversies, which professes to terminate them all, in reality terminates nothing. Its rights end where true religion begins ; it stops at the door of the sanctuary ; it rules all, except the heart, which is the first thing to be ruled : the

heart which God has commanded to be "kept with all diligence." It decrees, it canonizes, it excommunicates, it sometimes kills and tortures; but it toucheth not; it converteth not; it uniteth not: all this belongs to the Holy Spirit alone. The Holy Spirit alone answers every purpose; and in receiving it you will see all your difficulties vanish.

And whence arise these difficulties? Merely because the promise of the Holy Spirit is not believed. No, madam, it is not believed.* It is believed, indeed, for the priests, but it is not believed for every Christian; and false notions are entertained of the Spirit, which is believed in for the priests. I once heard a Curé, with whom I was discussing the subject, say, "I, indeed, have received the Holy Spirit, since I was in orders." Truly, madam, the Holy Spirit which is communicated by certain rules, certain exercises, a certain costume, is not the Spirit of which I have spoken to you in this and the preceding letter. The Holy Spirit which God has promised

* Mr. Mercier here, and in the following pages, speaks of the doctrine of the Romish church, such as it exists in practice, and in real life. That there is another in their theological treatises, and especially in their apologies, is very possible; but this neither enlightens nor saves the people. It has been more than once remarked, the Romish church has one doctrine for controversy, and another for practice; and it is in the latter that its true spirit is discovered.

is not believed in for the faithful in general ; and for the priests some other Holy Spirit is believed in, of which God has never spoken. Your objections have no other cause. They want a visible authority, because they are unacquainted with the invisible authority which resides in the Holy Ghost. They want a visible assurance, because they know not the invisible assurance which the Holy Ghost imparts. They want a visible unity, because they know not the invisible unity produced by the Holy Ghost. They want a visible priesthood, because they know not this invisible priesthood, which Christ exercises through the Holy Ghost. In a word, they want an entirely visible economy, because they know not the Holy Ghost, and do not understand that his inward and invisible action is the characteristic and privilege of the new covenant.

It is written in the New Testament, " We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen," 2 Cor. iv. 18. Your priests have reversed this order. To hear them, " the things which are not seen " cannot suffice us ; we every where require " the things which are seen : " a visible tribunal, which interprets the Scriptures, instead of the unseen Spirit, which explains them to the heart of the believer ;—a visible head, who " walketh before us," * instead of this unseen

* Let the reader pursue this comparison. He will find con-

King, who governs his church, seated in heaven, at the right hand of God;—a worship altogether visible and external, instead of that unseen adoration, which takes place “in spirit and in truth;” —a visible absolution, which strikes upon the outward ears;—a visible sacrifice, which we can see with our eyes, touch with our hands, convey to our mouth;—a visible sign, which applies the sacrifice of Christ to our bosom;—a visible cross, which we can take into our hands, and kiss with our lips;—visible images, before which we can prostrate ourselves;—a visible mark of salvation on the dying.

Constant appeal is made to what is called *the faith*; and in refusing to believe all that is enjoined, you fear to be wanting in faith. This is a strange confusion of terms. The faith of which they boast, is quite contrary to that which is so strongly enforced in the gospel. The faith of the gospel is opposed to sight; for it is written, “We walk by faith, not by sight;” “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed;” “Faith is the evidence of things not seen.” 2 Cor. v. 7; John xx. 29; Heb. xi. 1. But the faith of your priests rests entirely on sight;

siderable resemblance between the spirit which animated the Israelites on this occasion, and that which appears in the arguments of the apologists of the Romish church. 1 Sam. xii. 2—12.

for it only applies to things which are seen with the eyes, and heard with the ears. Here is the explanation of this difference. Their faith is faith in man; the faith of the gospel is faith in God. Follow the counsels of your priests, madam, and you will, in effect, have much faith, but it will be in the priests. Follow those which I make bold to give you; or rather, follow the commandment of God in his word, and you will have less faith in man, but you will have more in God. You will have faith in his word; you will have faith in "the things which are not seen," and which "are eternal;" you will have confidence in that which is the true object of faith. Ah! it is not surprising that the maxims of your priests should seduce the people, and that ours should startle them. Man likes so much to see, so little to believe. But that which pleases in their doctrine is against them; and that which astonishes in ours is in our favour. The faith which is recommended to you arises from a principle of unbelief; and what is called our incredulity, proceeds from a principle of faith. Whatever they may say, it is to the yoke of man that they would subject you. This yoke is imposed in God's name; but it places man constantly in view, and God is forgotten; so easily do we forget him!

Your priests say much of the difficulties of the path on which I urge you to enter. But even should these difficulties be such as they are

represented, which I have shown that they are not, it remains to be ascertained if we should not find difficulties infinitely greater in the way which Mr. Favien advises you to adopt. The reply I here make to his objections is that which he has himself made to the objections of Mr. de Lassalle. "The difficulties which you advance, as a reproach against Christianity," said he, "are nothing to those of infidelity, which you entirely overlook." I say, in my turn, The difficulties you see in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, are not to be compared to those which embarrass your visible tribunal.* The prejudiced mind of the Abbé does not perceive them; but you, madam, may turn your attention to them for a moment.

If there does indeed exist upon earth an infallible tribunal, established by God for the interpretation of the Scriptures, to which it is necessary to submit, in order to salvation,† how is it that the seat of this infallibility, the first point necessary to be ascertained, can never be exactly and

* One view of this idea is admirably developed in an English work: "The Difficulties of Romanism. By G. S. Faber." The same author has written a book, not less distinguished, on "The Difficulties of Infidelity." One of these works has been of great use to us in our first part; and the other in the second.

† Thus teaches the council of Trent: "I engage to retain and to confess this true Catholic faith, without which no one can be saved." Prof. Fid. Trident., in Syllog. Confes., p. 5.

positively determined; and that there are interminable disputes as to where the infallibility lies—in the bishops of Rome, in the councils, or in some inexplicable union of both? How is it that they have never been able to find, in support of this infallibility, on which they pretend to rest the salvation of the whole world, proofs solid, palpable, natural, and adapted to every one's capacity? How is it, especially, that Holy Scripture, so explicit on every fundamental point, has not once expressed itself clearly on an infallible church; and that it has abandoned the defenders of its infallibility to the fallible testimony of reason and tradition? How is it that they are afraid of a book, which they acknowledge to be the word of God; that they conceal it from the people; that they only allow its perusal with unheard-of precautions;* that it is the most frequently interdicted in the vulgar tongue; that there are so many priests, who repel, and who burn it? How is it that the chief authorities of this infallible church, that popes, that councils,

* See a decree of the council of Trent, which we have already quoted. "The Scriptures," says Hermannus, "are of no more value than the fables of Esop, if they are deprived of the authority of the church." Another author thus expresses himself: "The Scriptures are like a nose of wax, to which any man may give the form he pleases." (V. Baill., Tract. 1, quæst. 17; Albert Pigh., Hierar. Eccles., lib. iii. c. 3.)

should be found in flagrant contradiction one to another, sometimes even in open quarrel; and that they cannot be reconciled without having recourse to the most subtle, the most unwarrantable distinctions? * How is it that this infallible church has taught, and still teaches, doctrines evidently opposed to the clearest declarations of Scripture? Witness the worship of Mary, and of the saints, which it cannot bear to hear called idolatry, but for which it only thought itself able to vouch by suppressing that one of the ten commandments which forbids idolatry? thus condemning itself for its own justification. How is it that a great number of the heads of this infallible church, of these pretended vicars of Christ, have been men impious, wicked, perfidious, and debauched; and that the history of the popes is one of the most shameful pages in the annals of human nature; whilst the true interpreters of the Divine mind, the men whom God inspired to write the Old and New Testaments, form a constellation of saints? How is it that this infallible church has executed, or decreed, as a church, and in the name of its popes, or of its councils, some of the most execrable crimes of which the history of mankind has preserved the remembrance; that it has organized, or caused to be organized, by secular power, (it matters little which,) a system

* Examples of this may be seen in Faber, "Difficulties of Romanism," p. 247, etc.

of oppression and torture, surpassing in cruelty all that has been found among pagans themselves; that it has shed more Christian blood than ancient Rome, in her ten merciless persecutions; and has put to death, on one single occasion, a million of French subjects? * How is it that the council of Constance, a general council, joining perjury to barbarity, burned John Huss, who came to Constance on the faith of a safe conduct; justifying themselves by the detestable maxim, that oaths contrary to the interests of the church are not binding? † How is it that this church acts in direct opposition to the spiritual character of the gospel; that it thinks more of external government than of internal holiness; that it produces men attached to outward practices and forms, rather than men of faith and prayer; that it has constantly discouraged those amongst its members who have laid special stress on inward purity; that its glory is in the pomps and splendour of the world, when Christ's, and that of his church, are in self-denial and simplicity; and that, instead of glorifying God and his word, it tends incessantly to put man in God's place—

* The Albigenses, at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

† A maxim expressly advanced by the third Lateran council:—
“Oaths contrary to the interests of the church, and to the precepts of the holy fathers, are not true oaths, but perjuries.” It would be well, also, to see in what terms the council of Constance, in its turn, supported this doctrine. (Faber, p. 253.)

what do I say? to raise man, in some sort, above God? * How is it that there exists among the greater part of those who defend it, at the present day, a tone of levity and profanity, abuse, and revolting calumnies; so many means, in short, which truth and charity agree to disavow; whilst fair, moderate, and charitable apologies, like that of Mr. Favien, are rare exceptions? And, lastly, how is it that the conduct pursued by this church, its language, its worship, in a word, its whole order, present so striking a contrast to every idea that the gospel has given us of the Christianity of the apostles: and that it has, on the contrary, so fatal a resemblance to the unfaithful church announced by the prophets, which will forbid to marry, command to abstain from meats, have the form of godliness, while denying its power; and from a city seated upon seven hills, will subject to its dominion almost the whole of Christendom?

You ask if I am a Protestant, madam. I hardly know what to reply. You know that I am, by birth, a Catholic. My education, my habits, my

* In a collection of hymns, which we have seen in the hands of the people of Lyons, are found these impious words:—"God ordains mortals for his sacred ministry, stamps them with a character of holiness, and devotes them to his altars. By them the sinner becomes righteous; heaven is subject to their laws; and, in an august sacrifice, even God obeys their voice."

affections, my interests, my prejudices, are all in favour of the Catholic church ; but the arguments I have unfolded in my various letters have detached me from it, in spite of myself. There are, nevertheless, so many excellent things in this Catholic church ; it has so constantly maintained the Divine nature of Christ, which several sects have abandoned ; it has given its name to so many pious and charitable institutions ; it has reckoned among its members so many men eminent for knowledge and piety, that I have long hesitated. I also feared, in separating myself from it, to lose the little credit I may have with my friends, and which I am very desirous of employing for their instruction. You would not have consulted me, madam, had you thought me a declared Protestant. Yet I feel that I am now a Protestant in reality : for the Reformation goes entirely on the principle which I have maintained in writing to you ; namely, that a Christian can and ought to read the Bible for himself, with prayer for the light of the Holy Spirit. This avowal will, perhaps, offend you. I have only been brought to this after many conflicts ; conflicts the most sincere, and sometimes the most painful. Even to this present moment I have not made a public profession of Protestantism. Either from deference to my family, or from real or mistaken prudence, I have not yet been able to make up my mind to receive the communion

in a Protestant church. It is the last step that remains for me to take ; perhaps, I ought rather to say, a last link to sever ; and it seems to me as if God had brought about this correspondence, to lead me to acknowledge its necessity, and to give me the requisite courage.

If he, also, call you to "buy the truth," by some painful sacrifices ; if he oblige you to separate from the good Abbé Favien, you must resignedly submit. The Abbé is much to you, I conceive ; but your Saviour is still more. And remember, He who first began to draw you towards God, was not the Abbé ; it was the Holy Spirit. Yes, madam, this Spirit, to whose guidance they dare not intrust you, spoke to your heart when as yet you knew him not. He it was who opened your mind to the proofs of the truth of Scripture adduced by the Abbé, otherwise they would have produced no effect upon you, as they unhappily appear not to have made any impression on Mr. de Lassalle. He, also, it was who, doubtless, inspired you with the thought of having recourse to my poor instructions ; for he purposely chooses feeble means, that the success may be ascribed to Him alone. This same Spirit is now waiting to lead you to another voice, more powerful than that of man, and which alone can change the heart ; to the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ ; who, to borrow his affecting language, "calleteth his own sheep by name." May he speak to you

himself, madam! May he "enlighten the eyes of your understanding," and "call you out of darkness into his marvellous light!" Then will vanish, of themselves, all this "philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, and not after Christ," Col. ii. 8. Then will be fulfilled in you this second birth, without which none can see the kingdom of God, and by which we are made "new creatures," John iii. 1—8. And then, led by the Spirit of God, you can call him "Abba;" that is to say, your "Father," Rom. viii. 15, and enjoy all the privileges of his children. I cannot form a wish more worthy of the regard which I feel for you.

LETTER XVII.

LUCILLA TO MR. MERCIER.

I HAVE received your letter, sir, and am still agitated by the feelings to which it has given rise. What is there in your letters that thus shakes my inmost soul? Those of the Abbé himself, so kind, so charitable, did not produce this impression upon me.

I must tell you the whole truth. The time for precaution is gone by. Fear not to have offended me by speaking as you have done of the two churches. Though a Catholic by position, I am a Protestant by birth. But, as you

say, the salvation of my soul is my first concern. The question of the church will come after.

In your first letters I did not fully apprehend this wonderful doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Doubtless I still understand it but imperfectly; nevertheless, I seem to have a glimpse of it. How beautiful, how very beautiful it is! I still fear some illusion. Exaltation must be easy on so delightful a subject. The objections I have heard can no longer restrain me. Independent of the fact, that they appear sufficiently refuted by your explanations, they cannot, I see, counter-balance the difficulties which are found on the opposite side, and of which I had never before thought.

Ah! you are indeed right, when you say that I am still destitute of true faith! But this faith, sir, in what does it consist? I shall learn this, you say, by reading the Holy Scriptures. I ought to read them, doubtless; yet bear with me again in this matter; there is in the Abbe's letter a point on which you have not touched: I mean, what he says on the danger connected with this perusal. It had not at first struck me: but I have been reading Fenelon's letter on the Holy Scriptures; and I must confess that I am quite stunned by it. If there are really so many things in the Bible, which might shake the faith of the simple, and even give them occasion of offence, would it not be better, after all, that I

should confine myself to reading choice extracts from the Scriptures, or works in which the Christian doctrine is explained, but with the suppression of those features, so strange, or so opposed to the delicacy of modern refinement?

I began to read several books of this description, and, in particular, "The Imitation of Jesus Christ." I find much profit in its perusal: could I not rest here? There are, in fact, many pious people who never read the Bible; and hardly was it known in our rural district before the coming of the colporteurs.

LETTER XVIII.

MR. MERCIER TO LUCILLA. .

Pretended Dangers in the Reading of the Bible.

It is not from forgetfulness, madam, that I have been silent on the dangers which are feared for you, from the reading of the Bible. The Abbé's uneasiness on this subject seemed to me sufficiently to refute itself; and I confess that I could not but feel painfully impressed by this part of his letter. It appeared to me unworthy of him. The reading of the Bible dangerous! and he who says this considers it as the word of God! Can prejudice obtain such power over an enlightened mind? Besides, I flattered myself that my first

letters would induce you to read the Scriptures ; and had you done so, your own experience would have shown you the true value of these unaccountable fears. But, since you still hesitate, I will make an effort, in spite of my feelings, to show you that the reading of the Bible is not dangerous.

There is nothing which may not be abused ; and I do not deny that a man may find cause of offence in reading the Bible. It could offend a Voltaire, when in its sacred pages he sought subjects of diversion for the profane readers of his profane writings. It may offend others, who, without carrying impiety to this excess, read it, nevertheless, with a prejudiced mind, or a heart disposed to evil. The preaching of the gospel was also “ to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness,” says St. Paul, 1 Cor. i. 23 ; and the same apostle elsewhere writes : “ We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish : to the one we are the savour of death unto death ; and to the other the savour of life unto life,” 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16. Was it necessary, on this account, to abstain from the preaching of the apostles ? Certainly not. It was necessary to hear them, but to hear them with a desire for instruction, and for salvation. In this spirit, also, must the Bible be read ; then offence is impossible, and gives place to edification.

Let us begin by the most delicate point, that of morals. There are, it is said, certain things in the Bible, which may inspire the reader with evil thoughts, and even give him the idea of evil with which he is unacquainted. This subject gives me some embarrassment. I will treat it briefly and clearly, in the manner of the Bible itself. Living in a world which "lieth in wickedness," 1 John v. 19, we see evil all around us; we feel it in ourselves: we cannot, then, be absolutely ignorant of it; and the problem to be solved is this: "How can we know it with the least possible danger?" This problem the Bible solves with a wisdom, a purity worthy of its Author; and man cannot learn to know evil with less peril than in its pages. The Bible exposes wickedness, or rather relates it, gravely, briefly, clearly: yes, madam, clearly; calling every thing by its name: and this trait which is urged against it as a reproach, is admirable. It shows sin in its shameful nakedness, and does not cover it with those demi-transparent veils which only serve to excite indiscreet curiosity. It is in the Bible that we learn to see sin with the same eye that God sees it, and to turn from it with holy indignation. That which elsewhere might be a subject of temptation, here, in God's book, under God's eyes, and, as it were, in the society of the most faithful of God's servants, becomes a humiliating light, and a salutary warning. I am

so fully convinced of this, that I placed the Bible in the hands of my children as soon as they could read, as did the pious mother of Timothy.* Besides the advantage of receiving the first notions of evil from the holiest of books, children have that of receiving them at an age when the ideas from which injury is apprehended are still obscure; and when they become clearer, long and respectful custom will have taken off the keen edge of the danger. What I fear, is not the guileless simplicity of the Bible; it is rather the concealments of the world; those detestable equivocations with which the language of society is filled, in proportion as it becomes civilized, or rather as it becomes immoral. Among the ancients, as among the moderns, delicacy of language has increased in proportion as purity of manners has been lost; and the most ticklish tongues are found in the most corrupt nations.

In fine, madam, those who will not allow the Bible to speak to mankind of evil, what do they substitute in its place? The confessional! You cannot be ignorant of the revelations which have more than once been made on this subject, nor of the real danger which the confessional substitutes for the imaginary danger of the Bible. I confine myself to three questions:—Is it better

* 2 Tim. iii. 15. The words, "from a child," do not give the full force of the original. The Greek word (*βρέφος*) signifies a child in the earliest stage of infancy.

to learn the existence of evil from the mouth of a man, than from a book? Is it better to learn it with the developments of an interrogatory, where the omission of no detail is allowed, than in a brief recital which hastens to conclude the painful theme? Lastly, is it better to learn it from the discourse of a sinner, ever open to temptation, than from the solemn language of that God who "cannot be tempted with evil?" There are no people so moral as those among whom every one reads the Bible, and reads it from his childhood. Can as much be said for those countries from which the Bible is banished, and where the confessional holds its undivided reign? Hear what a priest has himself told me:—"Confession is truly a corrupting practice, both for the faithful, to whom it often suggests the idea of sins previously unknown; and for the priest himself, whose natural lust places itself under covert of ecclesiastical obligation, to propose questions worse than indiscreet."

Another danger is, also, found in the reading of the Bible; it contains, they say, many things that astonish, that seem unworthy of God, and that may perplex such as are weak in the faith. I grant that there are in the Bible facts mysterious, strange, even according to our ideas; but I maintain that the best plan is to read them in the Bible itself, not to refrain from the Bible in order to avoid them.

In the first place, it is useless to refrain ; you cannot avoid them. The most considerable of these difficulties are so closely connected with the ground-work of its doctrine, or its history, that you cannot undertake the study of religion without meeting with them. How will you relate, for instance, the establishment of the Israelites in the land of Canaan, without mentioning the command which they received from God to exterminate the Canaanites ? and this, as you know, is one of the facts which gives the greatest offence. And again, how can you live in the world without hearing of these obscure points in religion ?

Besides, in reading the Bible, we see these obscure points surrounded by certain circumstances which raise or diminish the difficulty ; whilst, separated from this frame-work, they appear much more strange than in the place where God has put them. Thus the order to exterminate the Canaanites is much more likely to give offence in a quotation of Voltaire, or even in a catechism, than it is in the Bible, where we see, by what precedes, and by what follows, how far the destruction of these pagans was justified by their crimes ; and how necessary this terrible warning was to the Israelites, who lost their prosperity and their religion entirely through having allowed these people to remain among them. This is especially true with regard to all

who, like you, madam, are aware that causes of offence exist in the Bible ; and who would flee for the purpose of not meeting with them. It is in the nature of the human mind to imagine these difficulties greater than they really are ; and the apprehension that there are in religion things which you cannot examine with impunity, will do more to stagger your faith, than the sight of these things themselves. So that even should the danger of which we speak be real, you must still resign yourself to it, as the only means of escaping from a still greater peril. But approach the Bible with an humble heart, madam, and the danger with which they terrify you will not exist. It will then appear to you quite plain, that there should be, in the ways of God, things which astound our feeble reason ; and believing in the great mysteries of religion, you will feel that there would be much inconsistency in your finding cause of offence in the lesser difficulties. What ! you believe in the fall of the rebellious angels, and you cannot believe in the fact related concerning the herd of swine at Gennesareth ! You admit the incarnation of the Son of God, and you cannot admit that Christ was tempted of the devil in the wilderness ! You submit your reason to the miracle of the inspiration of the Scriptures, and your faith recoils before the history of Balaam ! This would, indeed, be “ to strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.”

And more, madam. These strange and mysterious things, which are found in the Bible, have their utility; a utility entirely their own, and which nothing else could supply. They confound our ignorance; they place us in our true position before God; they teach us to be silent in his presence, and to allow him to act even when we cannot understand all that he does. I one day asked a child of seven years old, whether God was unjust in allowing the consequences of Adam's sin to extend to his posterity. "No," replied he. "And why, my dear?" "Because nothing that God does is unjust." This answer would have drawn a smile of pity from the infidel logician; to me it appeared admirable. It is with this simple eye that we ourselves must learn to regard the mysterious points of revelation; for, as Moses says, in a passage which I have already shown you in another point of view, if there are revealed things which belong to us and to our children, there are also secret things which belong unto the Lord our God, Deut. xxix. 29. This alternation of light and darkness is marvellous, and truly divine. Pascal, the Abbé's favourite author, has some fine pages on this subject, which I invite you to read. This clearness and this obscurity exercise our faith by turns, each in its place, and in its manner; and to an humble and upright mind, the darkness

remaining in the Bible will not be less salutary than its most luminous instructions.

But I am weary of justifying the word of God. I owe it too much to preserve, while defending it, the attitude of a cold advocate. It is with a heart full of emotion and gratitude that I would speak of it. Every time I take it in my hand, I seem in some sort to enter a new world. It is there especially, that I feel myself in the presence of God. Have you not felt this yourself, madam? But I forget that you have not read the Bible; and really I can hardly understand that it should have had no share in producing the ardent desire with which you seek salvation. In general, it belongs to the Bible alone thus to arouse the heart.

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” “He that hath the Son hath life.” “By grace are ye saved through faith.” “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” “We love him, because he first loved us.” “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” “Pray without ceasing.” “Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” What language, madam! I speak not here of the literary merit of the Bible; nevertheless, it equals, it surpasses, the most perfect productions of human poesy, or human eloquence; and it has furnished

our best writers with their most admired pages. I speak not even of that marvellous union of simplicity and depth, which has led a father of the church to compare it to a river, which in some parts might be forded by a lamb, and which in others could not be crossed by an elephant without swimming. By a pious man of our own age, it has been compared to the grass which serves for food at once for the least animals and to the greatest; but on condition that the latter should bow the head. I speak of something more inimitable, more celestial still; I mean the gravity, the unction, the superhuman force which breathes throughout the Bible, and which can be better felt than described. How well the Bible has been called by St. Paul, "the sword of the Spirit!" Eph. vi. 17. The Abbé has taught you to admire the beauty, the polish, the edge of this sword; it remains, madam, for it to penetrate into your heart. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. He alone can wield this "word of God, quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerners of the thoughts and intents of the heart," Heb. iv. 12. The Bible elsewhere compares itself to a hammer, which breaks the hardest hearts; to bread, which feedeth the soul to life everlasting; to a lamp, which enlighteneth our path; to a shield, which protects us; to tried silver; to a

fire, which consumeth every impurity. It produces on those who read it an impression similar to that which the voice of Christ produced upon his hearers. As they were compelled to cry out, "Never man spake like this man," John vii. 46, we, in reading it, are constrained to say, Never book spoke like this book!

No, madam, never book spoke like this book. In vain, you think to supply the place of the reading of the Bible, by substituting that of any work of devotion whatever. You mention "The Imitation of Jesus Christ." Without going as far as Fontenelle, who called it "the finest book that has issued from the hand of men, since the Bible is not theirs;" I acknowledge that it contains much that is excellent; and why? because it is derived from the Holy Scriptures. But it can never supply their place. It is not given to the spirit of man to contemplate things from the same point of view as God, and to show throughout, as does the Bible, God as the first cause, and all the rest in its connexion with God. Besides, for you, and for all who, like you, are still in search of truth, the "Imitation" has great defects. It is more fitted for the development of faith in the soul, than for its production; it says much of the Christian life, and little of regeneration. But the Bible is equally useful in beginning the work, in carrying it on, and in completing it.

Extracts, it is said, may be made from the Bible, catechisms, expositions of faith. But all these are to the Bible merely what a museum of natural history is to nature—a meagre substitute, whose only use is to recall some faint image of the originals, in the minds of those who have begun by the study of nature itself. How cold is the language of the catechism, beside that of the Bible! When I read in the Gospel these touching words of our Lord, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light,” Matt. xi. 28—30, I say to myself, It is Jesus, it is my Saviour, who speaks to me. I think I can hear his voice. And then each of these words is inexpressibly sweet: “Come unto me; I will give you rest; I am meek and lowly in heart; ye shall find rest unto your souls; my yoke is easy.” All this goes directly to my heart. I see him bearing his cross, and helping me to bear mine. I take courage, and strive to follow his steps. But when, instead of this, the catechism tells me that Christ has invited sinners to come to him; that he gives ease to those that suffer; and that his burden is not painful; it is, in truth, the same doctrine, but does it produce the same impression?

There are, you say, pious persons who have never read the Bible. I am not quite sure of this, madam. There are many souls, perhaps, that are fed in secret by the word of God; and as to such as are entire strangers to it, I cannot but think that something is wanting to their Christianity. They may have the zeal of a *sœur de la charité*, or of one of the “*frères*,” who take charge of the “Christian schools,” (a zeal which is unquestionably useful and respectable,) but the soul of the Christian life, communion with the Saviour, must always be in a low state. All true piety rests, in one way or another, on the Scriptures; and this support is felt even in the midst of many errors and infirmities.

Believe, madam, the unanimous testimony of the holiest divines of every age. It forms a perfect concert of praises to the glory of the word of God. Without recalling the manner in which the prophets and apostles have expressed themselves on this subject, (for this is more than the testimony of the holiest of men, it is that of God himself,) you will find in the church, as it were, a choir of venerable servants of God, who join hands from the apostles to us, and who all acknowledge that they cannot express what they owe to this reading, from which others seek to deter you.

“Let us feed our souls,” writes St. Augustine, “by the meditation and study of the Divine writings; let us satisfy our hunger, and quench our

thirst, by the heavenly meat and drink which it affords. Let us seek instruction in this school, so noble and so worthy of the children of God.”*

“Of this you may be sure, that as is our flesh when it only receives food once in several days, so is our soul when it is not frequently nourished by the word of God. For, as hunger and the want of food make our bodies meagre, so the soul which neglects to strengthen itself by the bread of the word of God, becomes feeble and barren, and unfit for any good work. Consider, then, if it be just, that our body, which is only formed of earth, should sometimes receive two repasts in the course of one day, whilst our soul, which is the image of God, hardly receives the word of life after having been deprived of it for several days. Continue to listen, as usual, to the reading of the Holy Scriptures in the church, and read them in your houses.”†

You should see with what vivacity St. Clement of Alexandria replies to those who believe themselves incapable of reading the Scriptures. “But we are not all capable, you will tell me, of this divine philosophy. We are not all capable, then, of attaining true life. What is this you dare affirm! How is it that you have believed, how is it that you love God and your neighbour, if you are not capable of the philosophy of which I speak! How is it that you love yourselves, if you have no taste for the other life! But I have

* Of True Religion, c. 51.

† Serm. 56. Of Time.

not learned to read, will you again tell me? If you know not how to read, you are bound, at least, to hear all that is read to you."*

Origen places the reading of the Bible among the number of things which feed the soul, and the neglect of its perusal among the greatest dangers to which our souls can be exposed.† If we are allowed to seek any pleasure in this life, it ought to be, according to St. Gregory of Nazianzen, only in the reading of the word of God, and in the meditation of his law.‡ "It is just and necessary," writes St. Basil, in his turn, "that every one should learn what is useful from the Holy Scriptures, as much for his advancement in piety, as that *he may not become accustomed to the traditions of men.*"§

But of all the fathers, the most frequent, the most urgent, in recommending the reading of the Bible, is St. Chrysostom. You may already have seen what he thought on the subject, from a few lines which I quoted from one of his writings in my reply to the Abbé, on the article of tradition. He repeatedly recurs to the subject: it is evidently one in which he takes great delight. I will confine myself to two or three citations. "Listen, I conjure you, all who are engaged in the cares of this life; procure the Holy Books,

* Pedag. lib. iii. c. 11.

† Homel. ix., in Lev.; chap. xvi. in Rom. lib. x.

‡ Orat. 38. § Reg. Brev., resp. 95, tom. ii., p. 449.

which are the medicine of the soul. If you will not take the whole of them, have, at least, the New Testament. The Acts of the Apostles, the Gospels; let them be your masters at every moment.—The cause of every evil is, that we do not know the Scriptures. We go to battle without arms.—I exhort you always, and will never cease to exhort you, not to be satisfied with what you hear in this place; but when you have returned to your houses, apply yourselves assiduously to the reading of the Holy Scriptures; neither have I ever neglected to insist upon this point with those who come to consult me in private.—And let it not be urged, I live in the world; it is not for me to read the Scriptures; it is the business of those who have renounced the world, and who have withdrawn to the mountains. What do you tell me? It is not your business to study the Scriptures, because you are distracted by a thousand cares! It is on this very account that it is more your business than theirs. But, perhaps, you will tell me, we do not know the things which are contained in the Scriptures. Well, if you do not know them, you have much fruit to expect from their perusal alone. Besides, it is not possible that you should be equally ignorant of all; for the grace of the Holy Spirit has expressly confided the composition of these books to unlettered men, in order that no one may make a pretext

of ignorance, and that all, even the least instructed, may understand and profit by the word of God. Who has need of a master to understand words such as these : ‘Blessed are the meek ; Blessed are the merciful ;’ and many other such ? And the miracles, the prodigies, the histories, are not all these clear and intelligible for every one ? The reading of the Scriptures is a great preservation from sin ; and to be ignorant of them is a mighty precipice, a deep gulf. To know nothing of the Divine laws, is greatly to endanger one’s salvation. It is this which has brought forth heresies, which has introduced corruption of life, which has turned every thing upside down ; for it is impossible, yes, impossible, that this reading should remain fruitless, for any one that applies himself to it with assiduity and attention.”* Most assuredly, madam, if you could consult St. Chrysostom on the question now in hand, he would not tell you that the reading of the Bible is dangerous, either to faith or to morals ; since it is ignorance of the Scriptures, if we may believe him, which has brought forth heresy, and introduced corruption of life.

It would be superfluous to cite St. Bernard, St. Anselm, the author of the “Imitation,” Pascal, and many others ; but I feel a pleasure in concluding this series of testimonies in favour of the reading of the Bible, by that of two popes. I do

* Third Sermon on Lazarus.

not know, however, whether we can give this title to the former of the two, St. Gregory : he was, indeed, bishop of Rome, but so far from pretending to the supremacy to which his successors have laid claim, he has not feared to declare, that whoever calls himself a universal bishop is a "precursor of Antichrist." "Give diligent heed, my dear brethren," said he, "to meditation upon God's word. Neglect not these Divine writings, which are as letters addressed to us by our Creator. Great advantage may be drawn from them; for it is by the perusal of them that our heart is warmed, and that we prevent our love from being extinguished, or from being slackened by the cold of iniquity."* Lastly, here is what was written by pope Pius VII., in a letter, dated April, 1778, and addressed to Mr. Antoine Martini, of Turin:—"You are very right in thinking, that the faithful ought to be excited to read the Holy Scriptures; for they are the most abundant fountains, and they ought to be left accessible to all. You cannot, therefore, find a more efficacious means than to publish the sacred books in the vulgar tongue of your country, which will place them in every body's reach."

But it is not necessary, madam, to go far in search of proofs of the benefit resulting from the reading of the Bible. They are renewed in every age; and I have myself seen the most touching

* Homi. xv. in Ezek.

examples. I will only refer to one, which will be especially interesting to you. The mother of a family was married to an infidel, who made a jest of religion in the presence of his own children ; yet she succeeded in bringing them all up in the fear of the Lord. I one day asked her, how she had preserved them from the influence of a father, whose sentiments were so openly opposed to her own. This was her answer, "Because, to the authority of a father, I did not oppose the authority of a mother, but that of God. From their earliest years my children have always seen the Bible upon my table. This holy book has constituted the whole of their religious instruction. I was silent, that I might allow it to speak. Did they propose a question ? did they commit any fault ? did they perform any good action ? I opened the Bible, and the Bible answered, reproved, or encouraged them. The constant reading of [the Scriptures has alone 'wrought the prodigy which surprises you."

I dare not place my feeble experience beside that of the great servants of God whom I have just named, nor even beside that of this humble and pious mother. Nevertheless, I wish to tell you, in my turn, how salutary the reading of the Bible has been to me. It is a debt I owe.

You will, perhaps, recollect, madam, that after my visit to the pious Oberlin, I derived from the reading of the New Testament the first dawning

of faith, which I had nearly lost by giving up this perusal. But when, after my conversations with Mr. Z * * *, I again took up the Bible, to make it the subject of attentive and connected study, I was shaken to my inmost soul. Until then, if I believed myself a sinner, it was on the faith of others, coldly, and without effect; but when I read with my own eyes in this book, which I had learned to receive as the word of God, "The wages of sin is death," Rom. vi. 23; "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10; I thought that I saw hell opened beneath my feet. The sword had pierced me through and through. I remained several weeks in this state, living in uneasiness, and fearing to die. At last, the same word which had so much troubled me, showed me the deliverance that God has prepared for the penitent sinner. It showed me my Saviour expiring on the cross for my sins: yes, madam, for *mine*; for I firmly believe that he has so much loved me, that even had I been the only person in the world to save, he would have come for me alone. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John iii. 16. I understood that, being lost by my works, I had no other resource than to give myself up to Christ, that I might be justified by his omnipotent grace. O madam, what a day of light! From this

moment all was changed. All my old ideas of merit and of virtue vanished away. I saw nothing but the grace of God, free grace, surrounding me on every side: the Father calling me by grace; the Son redeeming me by grace; the Holy Spirit regenerating me by grace. "By grace are ye saved, through faith: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works," Eph. ii. 8—10. "Created in Christ Jesus:" this is, indeed, the true expression: a new creation had really taken place in my soul; and the Holy Spirit bore witness with my spirit, that I was become a child of God. It was not "*of works*," but it was "*unto good works*;" for how can we forbear to love God, when we have been saved by grace? and loving him, how can we forbear to do all that he desires? "We love him because he first loved us," 1 John iv. 19. Then what I had so much sought, a sure rule, a solid resting-place, a rock, I felt that I had found it in the Bible.

After having thus brought me forth into the life of God, the same Bible affords daily food for my soul, and provides for every thing. All my strength is in these three words by which Jesus Christ himself repulsed the temptations of Satan in the wilderness, "It is written." Am I afflicted, and ready to sink under the weight of grief? it is written, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," Heb. xii. 6. Am I uncertain what I ought to do?

it is written, "The Lord will teach sinners in the way," Psa. xxv. 8. Am I railed at for my faith, and rejected even by my own relations? it is written, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," 2 Tim. iii. 12. Am I tempted? it is written, "God will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able," 1 Cor. x. 13. Am I sick? it is written, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord," Rev. xiv. 13. Do I pray? it is written, "Every one that asketh receiveth," Matt. vii. 8. That the vain reasonings of men, and their uncertain traditions, may seduce those who have never read the Bible, I can also conceive; but for me, who have made the blessed experiment of its perusal, should all the priests, all the bishops, all the councils, in the world, unite to tell me that it is dangerous, my answer is ready. As the man born blind, whom Christ had healed, said to the Pharisees, "Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see," John ix. 25; I shall say, in my turn, Whether the Bible be a dangerous book or no: one thing I know, that whereas my eyes were closed, now it has opened them.

These dangers, then, are so difficult to discover that they have escaped the attention even of God himself, since he has so often prescribed the reading of his word. Doubtless, he was not aware of them when he inspired David with the promise contained in the first Psalm: "Blessed is the

man whose delight is in the law of the Lord." He was unacquainted with them when he dictated these words to St. Paul : " All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," 2 Tim, iii. 16. He was unacquainted with them when he praised the Jews of Berea in these terms : " These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so," Acts xvii. 11.

Ah ! the Bible is indeed dangerous ; but for whom ? It is dangerous for infidelity, which it confounds ; dangerous for sin, which it curses ; dangerous for the world, which it condemns ; dangerous for Satan, whom it dethrones ; dangerous to false religions, which it unmasks ; dangerous, yes, highly dangerous, for every church which dares to conceal it from the people, and whose criminal impostures, or fatal illusions, it brings to light !

I conclude, madam ; I will no longer urge you to read the Bible. I know of no other arguments to add to those I have already given you ; and I dare affirm, that if they do not persuade you, nothing will. These are not sophisms, like the objections of your priests ; they are plain and simple reasons, drawn from the word of God itself. You now perfectly understand the matter ; yes, madam, you understand it. It is superfluous to inquire further. There are no longer

any doubts to be cleared; but there is a resolution to be taken. God says, Read; the Abbé Favien says, Read not. It is for you to choose. To obviate every difficulty, I send you a New Testament of Sacy. Madam, obey God rather than man; take, and read. Or if you will not——what shall I say then? If you will not to-day, I fear you never will. I fear that a longer resistance will offend God, and, perhaps, cause him to withdraw from you. I fear that you will do, as many others have done, whom the grace of God has attracted, but who have refused its invitations, and whom it has left to their own devices. Although I thus speak, madam, “I am persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation.” Hasten then to write to me, that you have chosen the word of the Lord, as “the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever!”

LETTER XIX.

LUCILLA TO MR. MERCIER.

WHAT will you have thought, sir, of my long silence? Perhaps, you will have despaired of me. But no; you could never have thought that God would abandon me. The bitterness caused by my delays can alone have suggested such an idea; but I felt that this bitterness was

all charity, and your charity has overcome me. The letter I received from you a month ago affected me more than any of the others; and its last lines almost broke my heart.

When I had finished them, I immediately took up your New Testament, which I received at the same time. It seemed sent from God. I opened it at the first page: I knelt down, and offered up this prayer to God:—Lord, this book is thy word. If it be true that thou hast commanded thy children to read it, deign to enlighten me by thy Spirit. If I have received evil counsels, withdraw me from error, and never allow me to forsake thee. Then I immediately began to read; but I resolved to write no more, either to you, sir, or to the Abbé, and to live a whole month without any other guide than God himself. Had the result been contrary to your expectations; had the reading of the Bible proved a source of perplexity and offence to my soul; you would never more have heard of me: but how different has been the effect! This perusal possessed such an interest, such a charm, that I sometimes devoted to it a part of the night. In less than a fortnight I had read the New Testament through. I immediately began it again; and I have just finished it a second time.

What a book, sir! It, indeed, produces all the feelings you describe. It terrifies and consoles me it disturbs and rejoices me, by turns. During

the last few days I begin to understand it. What you have found in the Bible, I also find there ; and this is a fresh proof of the unity of feeling which the Holy Ghost produces in those who read it with faith. My short experience convinces me even better than your letters ; and you will not be jealous, if I say to you what the Samaritans said to the woman who had announced Christ to them : " Now we believe, not because of thy saying : for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world," John iv. 42. I have learned to see myself as I really am, a poor sinner, who has never yet known her own heart ; and who imagined herself without reproach, while trampling on the holy law of God. But I have learned, at the same time, to see in Jesus Christ a Saviour full of mercy, dying to reconcile me to God. I hardly dare speak of my hope, it is so new : but new as it is, I feel that it is firm ; and I admire the suddenness with which it has been developed. Doubtless, there has been a preparatory work of God in my heart. You cannot imagine, sir, how much I was struck by that part of your letter, in which you express your surprise at my being so anxiously desirous to obtain salvation, without acknowledging that the Bible had any share in producing this deep interest : you are not aware that the serious impressions which first induced me to write to the Abbé, were called forth by

some extracts from the Bible, which I read in my "Manual."

Am I a Catholic, or a Protestant? I hardly know. I feel that I am become a Christian, and that suffices me; God will do the rest. On him alone do I depend. I know my own weakness; and it is with respect, with submission, that I should receive the counsels of a pious pastor; but I will place no man between God and me. I say this with you; and I now say it with a full understanding of the whole force of your meaning.

Can you imagine, sir, with what emotion, with what gratitude, I think of you, to whom God himself directed me; of you, who have so patiently borne with me; who have so kindly instructed me; of you, in short, who have led me to take the first step in a path, at the end of which I can perceive eternal life.

But no; gratitude must not render me ungrateful. If you have led me to take the decisive step, it was, nevertheless, but the second; the first, I owe to the Abbé Favien. This good Abbé!—I must tell you of my last conversation with him; but once more remember, that all I say of him is strictly confidential. As to myself, my new sentiments will soon be known; but I should indeed be sorry to compromise this worthy ecclesiastic, who is already not on the best terms with his bishop.

My intention was to write to him, giving him

an account of my correspondence with you ; but I would not do this until I had completed my month of retirement. He did not wait for my letter. Passing the day before yesterday, at some little distance from the castle, he came to pay us a visit.

As soon as we were alone, he mildly complained that I had not informed him of my decision. Then, without giving me time to reply, he said, "Do you read the Bible, madam?" "Yes, sir." "Just as I had foreseen ; I see you abandon us." I was, I confess, rather embarrassed by this abrupt address ; but my firmness gradually returned. "Surely, to attach myself to the word of God is not to abandon you." "You read the Bible, then ! and in what version, if you please?" "In that of Sacy." "That may do yet ; and your Bible, at least, is it complete?" "I have hitherto only read the New Testament ; but I have a great desire to procure the Old." "Yes, the Old Testament, mutilated by the Reformers!"

During this short conversation, he spoke with a certain irritability which I had never before seen. He recovered himself, however, and, as if he reproached himself with this emotion, said, "Do not think that I wish to disturb your mind ; but, my child," added he, very seriously, "are you reconciled with God?" "I hope so, sir." "You have, then, resolved to confess?" "No." "And

how can you know that you are received in grace?" "God has told me so." "God has told you! and how?" "In his word." "Explain yourself, I beg." "It is written in the gospel, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.' I have believed in him, sir. Oh yes! in Him alone: how, then, should I not be saved! what God has promised will he not perform?"

The Abbé listened to me with agitation, but without anger. A double feeling seemed to animate him; a fear that I should wander from the right way; and, perhaps, a desire of being himself enlightened, if I may say so without presumption. "Madam, your language surprises me to the last degree. Tell me all that has happened to you; tell me all. I conjure you to conceal nothing from me." I then gave him an abridged recital of our correspondence, and of the conflicts to which it had given rise in my mind. I offered to show him your letters, whenever he liked. You will not be displeased at this? It would be impossible for me to describe the expression of his countenance during this recital. He appeared absorbed in some profound reflection. When I had finished, he remained several minutes in a kind of reverie, when, suddenly, "Madam," said he, with a look which seemed desirous of piercing my very heart, "have you peace?" "Yes, sir, I have peace with God; thanks be to him for it." "If that is the case, I have nothing more to say.

You know how to pray ; pray.” He immediately arose, and left me.

Do you not think, sir, that this good Abbé will have said to himself, that the way in which I walk may indeed be the right one? If he dare not encourage me in it, at least he has not sought to turn me aside ; and who knows? he would, perhaps, have succeeded ; I am still so weak. But God has spared me ; and this visit, which I dreaded a little, has only served to strengthen me in my new sentiments. Immediately after, I bought the whole Bible of a colporteur, and began to read the Old Testament. I find more difficulties than in the New ; but, doubtless, they will diminish at a second reading. At all events, I am in the Lord’s school. He will teach me, in his good time, all that I require to know.

To the service of this all-merciful God I wish, from this time, to devote myself. Redeemed by the blood of Christ, all my desire is to live for him, and to die in him ; happy if I can see my husband and children partakers of the same faith. I have read a passage on this head, which fills me with hope ; it is the reply of St. Paul to the jailor of Philippi : “ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house,” Acts xvi. 31. Unite with me, sir, in imploring the grace of God upon my house.

CONCLUDING ADDRESS TO THE READER.

THE subject of the work which you have just read is a fiction ; but a fiction formed of real details. The words, the facts, here and there cited in this book, are all true. Lucilla, Mr. Mercier, the Abbé himself, are, with the exception of the names, and of a few circumstances, historical and still living personages. Whatever may be the case with the means I have employed to attract your attention, the end I have had in view is most important : it is to induce you to read the Bible.

You may, perhaps, remember the following fact in the life of St. Augustine. God had begun to speak to his heart, by the conversion of Alipus, his friend and old companion in pleasure ; but he still wavered between the service of Christ and the slavery of sin ; when he one day heard, or seemed to hear, a voice which said to him, *Tolle, et lege*, " Take, and read." He obeyed ; he took the Bible ; he read, and he believed. Well, dear

reader, I would perform for you the same office, as did this friendly voice ; and my desires would be fulfilled, if you would take leave of my little book, with this admonition impressed upon your heart : " Take, and read."

Nothing is easier at the present day ; it is the age of the Bible. At the same time that, translated into more than a hundred and fifty languages, it is spread from one end of the world to the other, the Bible every where penetrates, in our towns and in our rural districts, where it is sold at a low price by humble colporteurs. Is it, then, a law in our poor world, that good can never be done without opposition ? Would not one think, that some favour might be hoped for an enterprise so pure, so charitable, so evidently disinterested ? But no : there have been found men so unhappy, as to require that the word of God should remain unknown ; and who, having recourse to means worthy of their cause, have not feared to utter false imputations against the religious societies, against the colporteurs, against their very books, which they have accused of falsification. This accusation, we say it in the face of whoever chooses to hear it, is AN ODISIOUS CALUMNY, which they have never seriously tried to prove, and which they never will prove. Respectable ecclesiastics have themselves done justice to it ; witness the bishop of Montauban, whose expressions have been quoted word for word, (p. 111, 112.) The only

complaint he makes against the Bibles sold by the colporteurs bears upon the Old Testament, where he regrets the absence of some books which the Romish church has added to the canon of the primitive church. Well, do what this pious bishop authorised the people of his diocese to do : take the New Testament, the Testament of Sacy. What do you risk ? Begin by this. When the New Testament is read, you will see what you ought to do for the Old : " Take, and read."

Have you doubts as to the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures ? Alas ! there would be nothing astonishing in this, in a country where impiety has so long reigned under the usurped name of philosophy, and when Voltaire and Rousseau have, perhaps, been among the first authors you have had in your hands. Well, if you have doubts, must they not be cleared up ? Are you so determined, so enlightened in your incredulity, that it is useless for you to listen to the reasons of Christianity ? or is it not worth while ? If it were true, shall we tell you, with the Abbé Favien, that the Bible is the word of God, as so many excellent, so many gifted men have thought ; the Pascals, the Fenelons, the Bossuets, the Massillons. If it were true, and if you had been ignorant of it till this day, and if it only required a little attention on your part to be convinced of it ; and if you would, in short, examine religion and its proofs, how could you do it better than by

taking it at its source, and by reading this book, which by every one's confession, is the foundation of the Christian faith? "Take, and read."

But if you are so happy as to believe, if the Bible is in your eyes an inspired book, what shall prevent you from reading it, in order to learn for yourself which is the way of salvation? If you have not read the only book in the world that has come from God, how can you know the doctrine of God, and the will of God, with that firm assurance which is so necessary in order to live well, and to die well? Others will seek it for you, perhaps you say? But can you impose upon others the care of your salvation? This would be to forget your privileges as a Christian, and your dignity as a man; this would be to alienate a sacred right, which is, at the same time, a duty. The faith which saves cannot be received by a substitute; and we cannot go to heaven by proxy. And if those to whom you intrust your soul should mislead you? If they deceive themselves? What! you must reject an apostle, an angel, if he announce a new gospel; and you receive a gospel ready-made, on the faith of human guides, without consulting the word of God? O my friends! I would not wound your feelings; but you are aware of the power of habit, and of prejudice. Beware of the prejudices of childhood. The strangest errors, when imbibed with our mother's milk, may become to us a second nature.

Know, then, by what way you are led ; and allow not others, without your concurrence, to dispose of your eternal condition. "Take, and read."

Perhaps, you will charge him who writes to you with a spirit of proselytism. He wants you to leave the Romish church, to become a Protestant. I want but one thing ; it is the salvation of your soul. The important point is not the name you bear, but the state of your heart ; "for the Lord pondereth the hearts," Prov. xxi. 2. When we shall appear, you and I, before the judgment seat of Christ, he will not ask us if we have been Catholic or Protestant ; but he will ask us, if we have believed in him—if we have loved him—if we have served him, upon earth. Provided you become a faithful disciple of the Lord, I am content. Should your change remain all your life long a secret between God and you, I am content. Doubtless, the name, the position, the church, are not to be lightly chosen, or even lightly retained. To say that a man, who has acknowledged that the church in which he was born is not the true church of Christ, ought, nevertheless, to remain in it, because he was born there, is to support a fatal prejudice, to which indifference alone could have given birth, and which would have kept the Jews in their synagogues, and the Gentiles in paganism. But begin by becoming good Christians, and the truth will do the rest. "Take, and read."

My country! the religion of the Bible is the only one thou hast not tried. No; the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in all its simplicity, and such as it is found in his word, thou hast not yet known. Among us, the number of its disciples is only few; but they would wish to be for thee like the "little leaven, which leaveneth the whole lump." The secrets, in search of which thou hast vainly consumed thyself for so many years,—the secret of order with liberty—the secret of solid prosperity—the secret of public virtue—thou wilt find them all in the Bible, because thou wilt there find the first secret on which they all depend, that of salvation. Oh! if the Bible could serve as a guide to every individual, to every family, and to the whole nation, what a happy change! What purity of manners! what gentleness of mind! what family peace! what wisdom in education! what justice in governors! what submission in the governed! The primitive church of Jerusalem, where reigned unexampled charity, had no other rule than the word of God. Happy the day when this Divine rule will become that of entire France! It would then acquire a new glory among the nations: it would not be that of arms; not that of freedom; nor that of industry: it would be that of godliness. But because "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," 1 Tim. iv. 8; this

glory according to God, more surely than every precaution of human prudence, would cause France to triumph throughout the world. "Take, and read."

Priests of the Romish church! I have a word to say to you, in conclusion. You will not complain that I have wronged you in this work. The priest who represents you there, is a man of piety, moderation, and perfect honour; and the reasons which I have placed in his mouth are, if not the best you could have given—it is here I feel the difficulty of my task—at least the best I have been able to find. However this may be, I conjure you, in God's name, by the salvation of the souls committed to your care, by your own salvation, hinder not the people from reading the Bible. I know that there are among you pious ecclesiastics, who recommend its perusal to their parishioners; but they are, there is reason to believe, a small, a very small number. What! the Bible is in the world, and you would keep it from the people! and you would place yourselves between them and the warnings of the Holy Spirit! and you would not fear the terrible anathema which the Lord has pronounced against those teachers who have taken away the key of knowledge, and hindered men from entering in! Many of you are sincere, I am willing to believe; it would be too awful to suppose the contrary; and indeed the power of prejudice is so great, that

it can account for even this inexplicable error. But by what argument, by what sophism, can you then persuade yourselves, that you labour for the conversion of souls, by taking from them the word of God? You, who doubtless read this word, you cannot be ignorant of the blessings promised to those that read it; of the praise which St. Paul bestows upon it, in his second Epistle to Timothy; of the approbation given to the Jews of Berea, for having done—what? that which you prevent your flocks from doing in their turn! How dare you boldly confront such direct declarations! Answer me: when you ascend the pulpit, to exhort your hearers not to procure the word of Christ; or when you penetrate into a house, to carry away this treasure, does not your heart fail you? does not your voice falter? does not your hand tremble? And when you lie down to sleep at night, the remembrance that you have prevented some one from reading the Holy Scriptures, does it say nothing to your conscience? Ah! if you have no pity for your flocks, have pity on yourselves! Be faithful. If you have not sufficient courage, sufficient piety, to recommend the reading of the Bible, at least, do not oppose it. Allow the Lord to work; and until you can be “workers together with him,” beware of doing the work of the great adversary.

Moreover, “the Lord reigneth;” and he will

know how to give glory to his word. Consent, or resist, truth will have its course, to the confusion of its vanquished enemies, but to the glory and the eternal joy of all those who have devoted their efforts to promote its triumph.

THE END.

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